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ABSTRACT

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) is a standard folder containing information sheets that allow individuals in the United Kingdom (U.K.) to summarize their achievements and manage their learning and development in a nationally recognized format. Employer awareness and use of NRAs was examined through a telephone survey of 487 U.K. employers and 20 in-depth follow-up interviews. Overall, 62% of employers surveyed who knew about NRAs had used them. Employers who regularly recruited young people and employers involved with Investors in People were most likely to have a good understanding of NRAs. NRAs were generally used to complement rather than replace other recruitment methods and were most often used to aid discussion at job interviews. Most employers assessed training and development needs through performance appraisals and formal reviews. When NRAs were used, it was in addition to other mechanisms for reviewing/planning training and development. NRAs were not perceived as being particularly helpful in planning training. Approximately one-third of employers not using NRAs stated that they might use them in the future. NRAs were seen as a way for young people to capture school-age achievements but were not considered appropriate documents for adults to present to prospective employers. (Contains 28 tables/figures and 7 references.) (MN)

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Contents

Executive Summary ix

1. Introduction 1

1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Introduction to the National Record of Achievement 1
1.3 The present research 2
1.4 Research procedures 3
1.5 The achieved sample 5
1.6 Face-to-face interviews 6
1.7 Structure of this report 6

2. Employer Awareness and Use of the NRA 7

2.1 Employment of young people 7
2.2 Awareness of the NRA 7
2.3 Use of the NRA in recruitment 12
2.4 Use of the NRA in training and employee development 14
2.5 Summary 15

3. Recruitment Procedures and Use of the NRA 17

3.1 Recruitment procedures 17
3.2 Selection criteria 26
3.3 Relevance of the pages of the NRA 30
3.4 Reasons for not using the NRA in recruitment 32
3.5 Attitudes towards the NRA as a recruitment tool 34
3.6 Summary 35

4. Training and Development, and Use of the NRA 37

4.1 Employer approaches to training and methods used to identify individual training and development needs 37
4.2 Benefits of using the NRA for reviewing individual training or development needs 40
4.3 Reasons for not using the NRA for reviewing individual training and development needs 41
4.4 Attitudes towards the NRA as a tool for reviewing training and development needs 44
4.5 Summary 45

5. Potential for Future Use and Overall Assessment of the NRA 46

5.1 Potential for future use of the NRA in recruitment 46
5.2 Potential for future use of the NRA for training and development purposes 51
5.3 Overall assessment 52
5.4 Summary 53

6. Conclusions 55

6.1 Employers' use of the NRA: theory vs practice 55
6.2 Individual vs organisational perspective 56
6.3 Determinants of use 57

Bibliography 59

Executive Summary

This summary presents the main findings of a study for the Department for Education and Employment into employers' use of the National Record of Achievement. The main aims of the study were to find out why employers either do or do not make use of the NRA, examine the purposes to which it is put, and assess the potential for more extensive usage.

The research centred on a telephone survey of 487 UK employers conducted during July and August 1996, followed up by twenty in-depth interviews.

The sample of employers surveyed was *not* representative of all employers. It was not the aim of this research to assess the extent of NRA usage across all employers, and the findings should not be used for this purpose.

Employer awareness and use of the NRA

- The more regularly our respondents recruited young people, the more likely they were to have a good understanding of the NRA. Those involved with Investors in People also had a better understanding of NRAs.
- The predominant view of the NRA was that it was a backward looking document, which summarised achievements. A minority of employers understood the NRA to be a tool for planning and promoting development.
- Employers were more likely to have come across the NRA through young applicants presenting an NRA than through NRA publicity.
- Overall, 62 per cent of the employers who knew about the NRA had used it. Those that recruited young people more regularly were more likely to have used the NRA in their recruitment procedures.
- NRAs are generally not actively solicited by employers when recruiting young people, but rather, usage is supply-side led, *ie* through young people presenting them to their prospective employer. However, our findings indicate that the more NRAs employers see, the more they come to expect young people to present them in the recruitment process.

- The extent to which young people present an NRA to employers seems to vary between schools and geographical regions, perhaps depending upon the extent to which it is promoted by schools.
- Usage of the NRA in planning individual training and development is very limited. Where the NRA was used, employers tended to take on a supporting role in encouraging individuals to update their NRA. Incorporating the NRA into procedures for managing training and development, in any formal sense, was rare.

Recruitment procedures and use of the NRA

Respondents were asked about their procedures when recruiting to the kinds of jobs young people are most likely to take up.

- Interviews, CVs, letters of application, application forms and references were the most commonly used tools to aid selection. Almost all of the employers who had used the NRA in recruiting also interviewed applicants.
- The NRA was generally used to complement other recruitment methods, and the predominant view was that it should not be seen as being able to replace them. The NRA is used most commonly to aid discussion at an interview.
- Performance in interviews and tests of skill, personality and intelligence, were thought to provide the best indication of an applicant's suitability for a job. However, employers often felt it was not appropriate to consider the effectiveness of each of these tools in isolation.
- Reliability, honesty, motivation and attitude, were the most important attributes employers look for when recruiting to the types of jobs in which they most commonly employ young people. Qualifications and work experience were seen as much less important.
- The NRA was used as a source of information on the tangible criteria such as qualifications and work experience, and was seen as conveying these attributes best. Employers generally felt that the more important attributes, *ie* reliability and attitude, were not well conveyed in the NRA.
- All the pages of the NRA were seen as relevant. However, the attendance rate was viewed as most relevant. Employers found the document in its entirety was useful; the usefulness of specific pages varies by individual.
- The main reason for not using the NRA in recruitment is that few, or no, applicants offer them. Other reasons included preferring to use in-company forms, and a lack of sufficient knowledge about the NRA.

- In general, the view of our employers was that the NRA helps employers to understand people's personal qualities, but it does not accurately reflect the overall skills and attributes of prospective recruits and cannot substitute the need for a specific application to a specific job.

Training and development, and use of the NRA

- Our respondents were quite 'sophisticated' in terms of their approach to training and development, and the practices they have in place. The large majority used performance appraisals and formally reviewed the longer term development needs of their employees.
- Where the NRA was used, it was used in addition to other mechanisms for reviewing and planning training and development. Almost all of the very small number of employers who used the NRA for training and development, also used performance appraisals. Three-quarters used personal development plans together with the NRA, although it is not clear whether these documents were used for the same groups of staff.
- The NRA was seen as being owned by the individual not the employer. The majority of employers who used the NRA saw their role as being to encourage and support individuals, and to keep it up to date. The NRA being used on a formal basis to plan training and development was rare.
- One of the main benefits of using the NRA for these purposes included recording employee performance. However, the process of putting the NRA together was also seen as beneficial in that it encourages employees to take responsibility for their own development.
- The NRA was not seen as being particularly helpful to employers when planning training.
- The main reason for not using the NRA in training and development was that employers had never thought of it. There being insufficient guidance on how to use the NRA in this way was also a significant reason for not making use of it. Although our findings suggest that the advantages of using the NRA relate more to the individual, there are also benefits for the employer. These are both indirect, through motivating the workforce, and direct, through providing a record of the individual's skills and training. There may be potential, therefore, for encouraging employers to use the NRA by better informing them of these benefits of doing so.

Potential for future use and overall assessment of the NRA

- Our findings suggest that there is scope for encouraging more employers to make use of the NRA. Around one-third of

knowledgeable non-users thought that it might be useful to them in the future.

- The NRA was seen as something that is used by young people, capturing school-age achievements. The NRA is associated with school leavers. Employers see less scope for using it for their workforces as a whole.
- It was felt that, in its current format, the NRA would not be an appropriate document for *adults*, as opposed to young people, to present to a prospective employer. However, an NRA type portfolio would have a role as a personal resource to enable them to draw up effective CVs and applications.
- The most frequently suggested improvement was simplifying the NRA and making it more concise. However, reducing the NRA to a summary document was not seen as appropriate. Young people would need guidance to enable them to draw up effective summaries. Respondents also felt that the fundamental information they are interested in may be left out, if the NRA was presented to them in summary.
- More promotion and information about the NRA was seen as important by those who had not used the NRA. Integrating the NRA with initiatives such as Modern Apprenticeships, Investors in People, and NVQs, was seen as a potential vehicle for promoting the NRA. Employer forums or seminars run by Chambers of Commerce or Education Business Partnerships were all felt to be useful avenues to promote the NRA.
- There were a number of suggestions on features which could be added to the NRA, such as more detail on skills, work experience, career plans and personality. If the document is to be used for adults, employers want to see sections on competencies gained at work and work based achievements.
- The prevailing view was that the NRA was owned by the individual and it was up to individuals to keep their NRAs up to date. The value of the NRA clearly needs to be appreciated by young people, and both schools and employers have a role in motivating them to update the NRA.
- There are clearly benefits in the process of putting together an NRA, as well as the outcome, in terms of providing a record. Almost half of employers who had used the NRA in recruitment felt that NRA users were more confident of their abilities.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This paper presents the findings of a study for the Department for Education and Employment into employer's use of the National Record of Achievement (NRA).[1] The main aims of the study were to find out why employers either do or do not make use of the NRA, examine the purposes to which it is put, and assess the potential for more extensive usage.

The research centred on a telephone survey of employers conducted during July and August 1996, followed up by twenty in-depth interviews.

1.2 Introduction to the National Record of Achievement

The National Record of Achievement (NRA) is a document for individuals to summarise their achievements and manage their learning and development, in a nationally recognised format. The NRA format is a standard folder containing information sheets on:

- personal details
- personal statement
- qualifications and credits
- achievements and experiences
- employment history
- achievements in education
- attendance record
- individual action plan.

The NRA has three broad aims:

- first, to recognise and value individuals' learning and experience

[1] The study was conducted under the auspices of the Employment Commentary Programme.

- second, to promote lifelong learning, and
- third, to provide a vehicle to create a better skilled workforce.

The NRA is the documentary outcome of a process of planning, review and assessment, and is designed to encourage people to take an active part in their own learning and development. It is a document 'owned' by individuals, and can provide employers with a convenient and comprehensible record of what someone can do. Thus, the NRA has key uses for employers in the recruitment process. It also has a role to play in identifying individual training and development needs, and planning how to meet them.

The NRA was launched in 1991, and existing survey data shows that the overwhelming majority of school leavers have been issued with an NRA. The NRA is also used by trainees on government schemes, and to a lesser extent by college and university students. However, use of the document by employers is limited, especially for staff development purposes.

Dearing's *Review of Qualifications for 16 to 19 Year Olds* (1996) recommends a much wider role for the NRA, with it being used earlier in schools and as a tool in promoting lifelong learning. Dearing recommends that employers need to have a much greater commitment to the NRA if this role is to be fulfilled. For this reason, there is interest in how employees are using the NRA and the ways they feel it could be improved, as well as the factors which inhibit its wider use among employers.

1.3 The present research

This research was designed to provide up to date empirical data to inform this interest in employer use of the NRA. It is part of a Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) review of the NRA, with a relaunch of the NRA scheduled for September 1997. The three main objectives of the study were to:

- identify why employers either make use, or do not make use, of the NRA
- examine the purposes to which it is put, in both the selection and development of employees, and
- assess the potential for more extensive use among employers.

In order to meet these aims, we adopted a three stage methodology:

- **Stage 1** — a preliminary literature review
- **Stage 2** — a telephone survey of employers, both users and non-users of the NRA
- **Stage 3** — face-to-face interviews with employers who are aware of the NRA, to examine the issues in depth.

1.4 Research procedures

1.4.1 Research design

The parameters of the telephone survey were to:

- collect information from a sample of employers on recruitment, training and development procedures in general, as well as their specific use of, and views on, the NRA. In particular, it was agreed that the questionnaire should cover:
  - *on recruitment* — how the NRA fits with CVs, application forms and other material on which employers base their selections; perceived usefulness of the NRA; advantages and disadvantages of the NRA, and constraints on using it
  - *on planning and review of individual training and development* — employer approaches to training and development; how the NRA fits with current practices; usefulness of the NRA, and the extent to which the NRA facilitates action planning beyond Year 11 in schools
  - *on format* — how employers want the NRA presented, whether the NRA captures the all round quality of individuals, and accurately reflects skills and attributes
- achieve a sufficient number of cases to ensure both robust and reliable results; a target of 500 cases was set
- focus on those with the potential to use it, *ie* those who recruit young people, and are orientated towards training and developing their employees
- aim to achieve a sample of employers of whom 50 per cent had made use of the NRA
- undertake interviews lasting between ten and fifteen minutes.

As our intention was to understand how and why employers might, or might not, use the NRA, rather than to assess the extent of use, we agreed to focus the survey on organisations with reasonably well developed personnel procedures, and with a degree of commitment to 'good' employment and development procedures. To this end:

- the survey excluded small recruiters, *ie* those with under five employees, who are likely to have less sophisticated recruitment, training, and staff development practices in place
- the survey drew heavily upon employers from the Investors in People UK database of employers, in order to focus the survey on organisations with reasonably well developed personnel procedures
- quotas were set to achieve a sample which was two-thirds service sector and one-third production sector employers, and

was equally distributed between small, medium and large employment sizes.

Decisions about the initial design and aims of the research were made by IES in consultation with the sponsor. A draft questionnaire and approach letter were produced. A survey contractor, Public Attitude Surveys, was appointed and a pilot was undertaken.

1.4.2 Pilot

A small-scale pilot was initially undertaken, mainly to test the approach proposed. The pilot confirmed that:

- the approach letter worked well, and
- the questionnaire worked and flowed well, although several minor changes were introduced at this stage.

However, the pilot revealed difficulties in achieving an even split between users and non-users of the NRA, from a sample of employers from the Investors in People UK database. We understood from previous research[1] that we might expect about half of our respondents to have heard of the NRA. However, if the pilot was representative, it would suggest that as few as 20 per cent of the full sample may be knowledgeable, or use the NRA.

1.4.3 Post pilot changes

In view of the very small scale of the pilot, it was decided to continue the approach planned for the first 250 cases, introducing only small drafting changes in the questionnaire, but keeping a close eye on the response.[2]

Interviewing was halted after completion of the first 186 interviews. Of these 186 respondents, it was found that only 41 per cent had a little or good understanding of the NRA, thus confirming the concerns raised by the pilot regarding levels of NRA awareness and use.

In order to prevent a very low consequent participation rate, a decision was made to introduce a screening question in the remaining interviews. This would filter out those who were unaware of NRAs. Thus, the survey would concentrate on finding and interviewing those who were aware of, or use, the NRA. In total, 1,127 interviews were conducted, of which 46 per cent were terminated due to insufficient awareness of the NRA.

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[1] Public Attitude Surveys Ltd, 1995.

[2] The questionnaire is available in a separate Technical Report which also contains other letters and questionnaire materials.

1.4.4 Fieldwork conducted

The basic procedure adopted was to issue a letter of invitation to potential participants before they were contacted by telephone. The letter explained the purpose of the survey and sought the respondent's participation.

The telephone interviews were conducted between 1 July and 5 August 1996, using a CATI script derived from the questionnaire agreed with the sponsor. Full telephone interviews were eventually achieved with a sample of 487 employers.

1.5 The achieved sample

Details of the numbers of interviews achieved at each stage of the research are outlined in Table 1:1 below.

Full details of the characteristics of the achieved sample are provided in the technical report. In summary:

- The achieved sample was fairly evenly distributed between the three broad size categories: six to 49, 50 to 199, and over 200 employees, although there was some over sampling of small employers.
- We achieved a sample of which 41 per cent was in the production sector and 59 per cent were service sector employers. A high proportion of the sample were in the catering and retail sectors, which is where young workers are concentrated.
- Almost nine out of ten employers were in the private sector. Around two-thirds were part of a group of establishments belonging to the same organisation, but within 87 per cent of these, decisions relating to recruitment and development were made at the establishment surveyed.
- Half of the sample had achieved the Investors in People standard, and a further one-third had publicly committed to Investors in People.

Table 1:1 The achieved sample

No. of interviews	Stage	Notes
1,127	Initial telephone interviews	This included 187 before, and 940 after, screening was brought in.
	of which:	
487	were full telephone interviews	All but 50 of these had heard of the NRA.
	of which:	
20	had an in-depth face-to-face interview as well	

Source: IES Survey, 1996

1.6 Face-to-face interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 of the respondents to the telephone survey during October 1996. These employers all had a good understanding of the NRA. The sample included both users and non-users.

- *Users* — a group of NRA users were selected, which included those who have used the NRA in recruitment only, and in both recruitment and training and development.
- *Non-users* — a group of NRA employers who had not used the NRA was selected. These closely resembled the characteristics of NRA users in terms of their approach to training and development, and the recruitment and training practices they had in place. These employers all had a good understanding of the NRA, and employ and recruit young people.

These interviews followed up on a number of issues covered by the telephone survey, in more detail.

1.7 Structure of this report

The content of each chapter is outlined below.

Chapter 2 covers the employment and recruitment of young people and awareness and use of the NRA.

In Chapter 3 we look at our employers' recruitment procedures and how the NRA fits with these; how the NRA is used, how it is rated compared with other recruitment methods. Reasons for not using the NRA among non-users are also considered.

Chapter 4 looks at approaches to reviewing and planning individual training and development, and use of the NRA, again discussing how the NRA fits with these practices, how it is rated, and reasons for not using NRA.

Chapter 5 considers the potential for future use, and provides an overall assessment of employers' attitudes towards the NRA.

In Chapter 6 we present our conclusions.

2. Employer Awareness and Use of the NRA

In this chapter, we look at NRA awareness in relation to the characteristics of the employers who are aware of the NRA, in particular their recruitment of young people. We then turn to use of the NRA and the characteristics of employers who use, and do not use, the NRA in their recruitment and individual training and development practices.

2.1 Employment of young people

The majority of school leavers are issued with an NRA. Therefore, the higher the proportion of an establishment's employees who are aged 21, and the more regularly they recruit people from education, the more likely it is that the employer will have come across the NRA. Our respondents were asked about the proportion or number of employees they had which were in this age group at the time of the telephone survey. They were also asked about from where young people were recruited. The detailed findings from these questions are provided in the technical report, but in summary we found that:

- the majority (87 per cent) of employers surveyed employed people aged under 21; half recruited young people every year
- retailing and catering sector companies employ high proportions of young people. In almost half of hotels and restaurants, over one-fifth of the workforce was aged under 21.
- over half of our sample recruited young people directly from school. These employers were therefore likely to have come across young people in possession of an NRA.
- large employers recruit young people more regularly and are more likely than smaller establishments to recruit young people directly from school.

2.2 Awareness of the NRA

Before we discuss awareness levels among our respondents with whom we conducted full telephone interviews, we present in Table 2:1 the awareness of all employers contacted. This table includes those employers for whom the interview was terminated, either because they were filtered out due to lack of awareness, or because they fell outside the quotas set. These

Table 2:1 Awareness of the NRA (per cent)

Level of awareness	All
Never heard of it	32
Heard of it, but uncertain what it is	23
Know a little about it	25
Have a good understanding of the NRA	18
N = all respondents	*1,127*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

results are useful in that they provide an indication of the extent of awareness among our sample of employers, 98 per cent of whom were drawn from the Investors in People UK database.

From Table 2:1, we can observe that 43 per cent of our employers were aware of the NRA. We are defining awareness as either having a good understanding of the NRA or knowing a little bit about it. A further 23 per cent had heard of the NRA but were uncertain what it was. At the other extreme, almost one-third had never heard of the document. The *Skill Needs in Britain* study (PAS, 1996) found that 50 per cent of employers had heard of the NRA, in response to a question asking about awareness of a range of initiatives. Comparison between the two surveys is difficult due to the different wording and contexts in which the questions were asked. The interviews with over half of our employers were terminated after this initial screening question. We are therefore unable to analyse these data by any other variables.

In Table 2:2 we present the awareness rates for the employers with whom we undertook full telephone interviews. Within this sample, less than a quarter were 'unaware' of the NRA, *ie* had never heard of it or had heard of it but were uncertain what it

Table 2:2 Awareness of the NRA (per cent)

Level of awareness	All	Recruitment of young people				Proportion of young people in the workforce			
		Never	Rarely/ Occasionally	Most years	Every year	None	0.1 to 10%	10.1 to 20%	Over 20%
Never heard of it	10	41	11	13	6	31	7	5	9
Heard of it, but uncertain what it is	12	7	17	5	12	8	14	13	11
Know a little about it	46	37	45	50	46	35	48	47	48
Have a good understanding of the NRA	31	15	27	33	36	26	30	36	33
Mean score	*2.99*	*2.26*	*2.87*	*3.02*	*3.12*	*1.30*	*3.01*	*3.15*	*3.04*
N = whole sample	*487*	*27*	*128*	*80*	*241*	*65*	*231*	*88*	*103*

Note: The nearer the mean score is to four, the higher is the awareness.

Source: IES Survey, 1996

was. Nearly one-third of these respondents had a good understanding, and almost half knew a little about the NRA.

All of the respondents with whom we undertook in-depth face-to-face interviews had stated in the telephone survey that they had a good understanding of the NRA. In order to provide some insight into what respondents meant by 'a good understanding of the NRA', these employers were asked what they thought the NRA was for. There were two views of the NRA:

- The predominant view was that the NRA was a backward looking document for young people to summarise their achievements, both educational and extra-curricular, and to take to an interview.
- A minority view was that it was a forward looking document tracking, promoting and prompting development over time.

The following comments illustrate these two viewpoints:

> *'It provides an evaluation of how the individual has done at school and how they got on in work experience. It provides an insight into their personal characteristics as well as their academic achievements.'* — An employer who had used the NRA extensively in recruitment.

> *'A living breathing document which grows with people, to record achievements and highlight achievements other than academic ones. For the employer, the NRA could form part of the appraisal, but the document is primarily for the individual.'* — An employer with a background in education.

Tables 2:2 and 2:3 provide an analysis of the interrelation between awareness of the NRA among the telephone survey respondents, and recruitment of young people, employment of young people and involvement with the Investors in People initiative. In order to give a simple measure of the relative importance of these factors in influencing employers' awareness and understanding of the NRA, we have provided a mean score for the awareness level. A score was attributed to each of the

Table 2:3 Awareness of the NRA (per cent)

Level of awareness	All	Investors in People status		
		Not involved	Committed	Achieved
Never heard of it	10	18	9	8
Heard of it, but uncertain what it is	12	20	11	13
Know a little about it	46	48	49	41
Have a good understanding of the NRA	31	14	32	38
Mean score	*2.99*	*2.58*	*3.04*	*3.10*
N = whole sample	*487*	*50*	*244*	*164*

Note: The nearer the mean score is to four, the higher is the awareness.

Source: IES Survey, 1996

responses, ranging from one, 'never heard of it', to four, 'have a good understanding of the NRA'. The nearer this score is to four the higher is the awareness. From this analysis, we are able to draw the following conclusions.

- The regularity of the recruitment of young people and the proportion of the workforce made up by young people are the key variables explaining NRA awareness. Of those that had recruited young people every year, 82 per cent knew a little about, or had a good understanding of, the NRA.
- There is also a relationship between involvement with Investors in People and awareness of the NRA, but to a much lesser extent. Involvement with the initiative is being used here to provide a crude indicator of the sophistication of employers' recruitment and development systems. Around 80 per cent of those involved had a good understanding or knew about the NRA, compared with 62 per cent of those not involved.

Those employers who employ the highest proportions of young people have a lower mean score for awareness than those where young people make up between ten and 20 per cent of the workforce. This is likely to be because those with the highest proportions of young people are smaller and have less sophisticated recruitment practices.

NRA awareness levels also increase with size of employer. This broadly ties in with our finding that large employers both recruit young people more regularly and are more likely to recruit straight from school than small employers.

In Table 2:4 we present our findings relating to how our respondents have come to hear of the NRA. The source of awareness has been divided into four main categories: young people, NRA publicity, employers and other sources. It is clear from this table that employers' knowledge is, to a large extent, driven by their relationship with young people. Forty-two per cent of employers had first come across the NRA either through potential recruits and employees, or through their own children. This finding was confirmed by the face-to-face interviews, as illustrated by the following responses:

> *'I am aware of the NRA because my sons have them and my assistant has one; I haven't seen any literature about the NRA.'*

> *'Through my background in education and my job as a teacher; also my staff's children have had them. I have not been educated* [about the NRA] *as an employer.'*

Even though one employer had heard about the NRA through being a parent and their connections with the local TEC and schools:

> *'. . . the first I really knew about it was when a school leaver brought one in and asked to show it to me.'*

A quarter of respondents to the telephone survey had heard of the document through NRA publicity, either through NRA leaflets or literature, or through the media. Some of the employers with whom we conducted face-to-face interviews had been involved in the development of the NRA or had come across it through their involvement in education business link activities, such as work experience, Young Enterprise, and attending careers events at local schools.

In Table 2:4 we cross-analyse the source of awareness telephone survey data by level of NRA awareness. This analysis indicates that hearing about the NRA through young applicants or employees leads to a better understanding of the initiative, as suggested by the above quotation. One-third of those who knew a little about the NRA had heard of it through this route. Conversely, those who had heard of the NRA but were uncertain what it was, were more likely to have heard of it through NRA literature or the media. This suggests that such publicity is having an impact upon initial awareness, but is not so effective at creating a strong understanding of NRAs.

Table 2:4 How respondents have heard of the NRA (per cent)

Source of awareness	All	Level of NRA awareness		
		Heard of it but uncertain what it is	Know a little about it	Have a good understanding
Young people				
Through young applicants/employees in possession of a NRA	27	8	33	26
Through your children	15	8	12	21
NRA publicity				
Through leaflets, posters or literature on the NRA	16	20	17	14
Through the press or media	9	18	10	3
Employer sources				
Through employer networks/associations	8	8	5	13
Through a representative of your company/organisation	5	7	4	7
Other sources				
Having an NRA or a personal contact having or knowledgeable about NRAs	9	2	9	11
Through schools/colleges/universities	4	2	4	5
TEC	3	5	2	3
Other	8	10	8	9
Can't remember	6	15	6	3
N = those who have heard of the NRA (multiple responses allowed)	*437*	*60*	*224*	*153*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

There is little variation between the type of employer and their source of NRA awareness except that, as we would expect, those who recruit young people most regularly, and have the highest proportions of young people in their workforce, were more likely to have heard of the NRA through their employees or applicants.

2.3 Use of the NRA in recruitment

We now go on to consider the extent of use of the NRA in recruitment procedures and the characteristics of those employers who had made use of the document. It should be noted that in the remaining tables in this chapter, our base is those employers who were aware of the NRA, referred to henceforth as 'aware employers'. These are employers who:

- knew a little about the NRA, or
- had a good understanding of the NRA.

In Table 2:5, we show that 62 per cent of our aware employers had used the NRA when recruiting. We have no data relating to how often or how much they had used the NRA, but in Chapter 3 we go on to consider how they used the NRA. Here we are concerned with the characteristics of the employers who had used NRAs. We can see from Table 2:5 that a significantly higher proportion (62 per cent) of large employers had used the NRA than small ones, of whom only 40 per cent had used it. This is likely to be a reflection of our finding that large employers recruited young people more regularly. We also show in Table 2:5 that the more regularly employers recruited young people, the more likely they were to have used the NRA. Less than one-third of those who recruited every year had not used the NRA.

From Table 2:6, we can observe that there is very little variation in NRA usage according to ownership and industrial sector. However, we do see some association between Investors in People involvement and use of the NRA. Only half of those not involved in Investors in People, but aware of the NRA, had used it, comparing with almost two-thirds of Investors in People committed employers.

Table 2:5 Use of the NRA in recruitment (per cent)

NRA use in recruitment	All	Employment size			Recruitment of young people			
		6-49	50-199	200+	Never	Rarely/ Occasionally	Most years	Every year
Users of the NRA	62	40	64	63	43	53	60	69
Non-users of the NRA	38	60	36	37	57	47	40	31
N = those aware of the NRA	*377*	*119*	*131*	*127*	*14*	*92*	*66*	*197*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

Table 2:6 Use of the NRA in recruitment (per cent)

NRA use in recruitment	All	Ownership			Sector		Investors in People status		
		Private	Public	Charity/ voluntary	Production	Services	Not involved	Committed	Achieved
Users of the NRA	62	63	65	40	65	61	52	65	63
Non-users of the NRA	38	37	35	60	35	39	48	36	37
N = whole sample	*377*	*324*	*43*	*10*	*145*	*232*	*31*	*197*	*130*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

Forty per cent of employers who used the NRA in recruitment first heard of the NRA through young applicants or employees. A further 14 per cent of users had heard of the document through their own children, and 13 per cent through NRA publicity. Our findings from the telephone survey thus indicate that use of the NRA is driven by young people. There appears to be a certain level of passive usage, *ie* young people showing the NRA to their prospective employer, rather than employers actively soliciting the document. Evidence from the employers visited supports this view. Only a small minority had a company policy which stipulated that the NRA should be used in the recruitment process. However, it was generally seen as a bonus if young people did show their NRA to a prospective employer, and for some of our respondents it was an expectation that young people did so.

> *'We deliberately do not ask for the NRA. It is not a test to see whether they do or not, but it does provide an indication of their initiative if they do bring it along to their interview.'*

> *'If someone brought an NRA along we would be impressed; it would be a sign of initiative as well as showing any evidence of their suitability.'*

Employers can often see it as a bad sign if young people do not present their NRA, and be wary of those without them as 'they may have something to hide'.

Individuals with NRAs tended to be young people coming straight from school, college, or a training provider. None of the employers we visited had come across an adult or a recent graduate with an NRA. The extent to which young people had presented their NRA to employers varied considerably. One employer who recruited 60 people per year, most of whom were young, had only ever seen two NRAs. Very few of their applicants had ever presented or even mentioned an NRA. For this reason, they did not overtly solicit the NRA in their selection process. In contrast, another employer was almost overwhelmed by the amount of NRAs which they were sent; some young people even sent their NRA with a speculative application which incurred considerable expense when returning them. This variation in young people presenting NRAs appears to be both between schools and geographical regions. A

typical view was that this was down to the extent to which schools pushed the NRA:

> *'Local schools are not pushing the NRA. Kids are not really pressured to complete and update them.'*

> *'I am not sure how widely the NRA is used by schools. I get the impression that it is more widely used in some boroughs than others, and within boroughs it is used more in some schools than others.'*

However, one employer felt that NRAs were being offered more than they used to be and were becoming more widely used among young people.

2.4 Use of the NRA in training and employee development

We found that the NRA is not widely used for planning individual training and development. Table 2:7 shows that only seven per cent of our NRA aware employers had used the document for training purposes, and even fewer (three per cent) for development. However, we found that this type of usage was even lower than the telephone survey suggested. Virtually all of this group of employers were contacted in preparation for the face-to-face interviews. At this stage, almost half of this seven per cent said that, in fact, they did not use the NRA for training and development purposes. Some respondents explained that they only used it for the occasional Youth Trainee or Modern Apprentice. Furthermore, among those who did use it in this way, the manner in which it was used was limited. Generally, employers took on a supporting role in encouraging individuals to update their NRA. Incorporating the NRA in any formal sense into procedures for managing training and development was rare. We discuss these issues further in Chapter 4.

There was virtually no variation in this type of NRA usage, according to employment size and recruitment of young people. However, we have found that among those not involved with Investors in People, there was the lowest proportion using the NRA for training and development. These findings must be treated with caution due to the small numbers involved.

Employers were asked if they had used the NRA for any purposes other than recruitment, training or development.

Table 2:7 Use of the NRA in training and development (per cent)

NRA use	All
Users of the NRA for training purposes	7
Users of the NRA for development purposes	3
Do not use the NRA for training or development	91
N = those aware of the NRA	*377*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

Sixteen per cent mentioned that they had used the NRA for work experience placements.

We may conclude that although we have come across relatively high levels of NRA usage in recruitment, we found very little use made of the NRA as a tool for planning training or development. Very few employers used the NRA for training and development, but did not use it in recruitment. This indicates that the NRA is likely to start being used in recruitment and it then may percolate through to usage for planning training and development. It could be argued that as the NRA is an 'individual' based document, we would not expect it to be used by employers as a tool for planning training, as such. However, we could expect them to encourage and support employees to update their NRAs and work with employees in using it for training and development purposes. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 4.

2.5 Summary

- The majority (87 per cent) of employers surveyed employed people aged under 21; half recruited young people every year. In almost half of hotels and restaurants, over one-fifth of the workforce is aged under 21.
- The majority of school leavers are issued with an NRA and over half of our sample recruited young people directly from school. These employers were therefore likely to have come across young people in possession of an NRA.
- Among all the 1,127 employers contacted for a telephone interview, 43 per cent knew a little about or had a good understanding of the NRA. A further quarter had heard of it, but were uncertain what it was.
- The more regularly our respondents recruited young people, the more likely they were to have a good understanding of the NRA. Those involved with Investors in People also had a better understanding of NRAs.
- The predominant view of the NRA was that it was a backward looking document, which summarised achievements. A minority of employers understood the NRA to be a tool for planning and promoting development.
- Employers were more likely to have come across the NRA through young applicants presenting an NRA than through NRA publicity.
- Overall, 62 per cent of the employers who knew about the NRA had used it. The more regularly employers recruited young people, the more likely they were to have used the NRA in their recruitment procedures.
- Our findings suggest that NRAs are generally not actively solicited by employers when recruiting young people, but

rather, usage is supply-side led, *ie* through young people presenting them to their prospective employer. However, our findings indicate that the more NRAs employers see, the more they come to expect young people to present them in the recruitment process.

- The research findings indicate that the extent to which young people present an NRA to employers seems to vary between schools and geographical regions, perhaps depending upon the extent to which it is promoted by schools.

- Usage of the NRA in planning individual training and development is very limited. Despite the survey methodology of filtering out employers who did not know about NRAs, only nine per cent of our 'aware' employers used the NRA for this purpose. Where the NRA was used, employers tended to take on a supporting role in encouraging individuals to update their NRA. Incorporating the NRA into procedures for managing training and development, in any formal sense, was rare.

3. Recruitment Procedures and Use of the NRA

In recruitment, an NCVQ document *'Using the NRA: A Guide for Employers'* (1994), states that the NRA can be used as a selection aid. As the guide explains:

> *'The summarised information gives a rounded view of individuals, their abilities and their potential.'* (NCVQ, 1994, p.1)

This guide goes on to emphasise that the NRA can benefit employers by supplying a broad view of candidates' abilities by presenting a wide range of information in a clear and systematic format.

In this chapter, we follow on from our discussion of the characteristics of NRA users. We look at how the NRA is used in selection procedures, and how it is rated compared with other recruitment methods. In particular, we focus on methods used to recruit young people. The chapter discusses how well those employers who have used the NRA in their recruitment procedures consider that the NRA conveys individuals' abilities and attributes, and the relevance of each of the sections of the document. Finally, we focus upon the employers who are aware of the NRA but have not used it as a recruitment tool.

3.1 Recruitment procedures

3.1.1 Occupation characteristics of most frequent recruit

As we have shown in Chapter 2, most (95 per cent) of our interviews were conducted with employers who had recruited young people within the last four years. We wanted to establish what recruitment procedures employers use, focusing upon those used for recruiting young people, and how the NRA fits into these recruitment practices. It is well established that recruitment procedures vary greatly by occupation, and we also know that NRAs are most likely to be used in the recruitment of young people. Taking these two considerations into account, we asked our respondents to focus on the recruitment to the kind of job to which they most often recruited young people. The five per cent of employers who did not recruit young people, focused upon the jobs they recruit to most often overall. The occupational classification of the types of jobs are shown in Table 3:1.

Table 3:1 Occupations employers recruit to most often (per cent)

Occupation	All	Employers which employed people aged under 21	Employers which employed no people aged under 21
Managers and professionals	4	4	8
Associate professionals and technical occupations	2	1	11
Clerical and secretarial occupations	22	22	13
Craft and related occupations	10	10	8
Personal and protective service occupations	8	8	8
Sales occupations	6	5	11
Plant and machine operatives	10	10	11
Other occupations	9	8	32
No specific job	28	30	–
N = whole sample	*487*	*449*	*38*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

We can observe from Table 3:1 that our employers were focusing on a broad range of occupations, although over a quarter were unable to say what the main occupation was to which they recruited young people. In this table, we can see that there is concentration of recruitment to clerical and secretarial, craft, plant and machine operative positions. As we can observe from the second column of the table, these are the occupations to which young people are most likely to be recruited. Among the employers who did not recruit young people, and therefore were focusing upon the jobs they recruited to most often overall, a higher proportion (21 per cent) took on managers, professionals and technical occupations. All of the employers with whom we conducted face-to-face interviews regularly recruited people aged under 21. This group of employers included recruiters of young people to the full range of occupations listed in Table 3:1, although there was a concentration on hotel and catering, retail, office administration, and machine operative occupations.

3.1.2 Selection methods

In selecting the right person for these specific jobs, respondents were asked if they took into account any of the list of selection methods presented in Table 3:2. Our findings show that by far the most common selection criterion used was performance in interview, which was employed by 97 per cent of employers in the sample. Other techniques which appeared to be significant were the applicant's CV, a letter of application, a completed application form and a reference. The applicant's NRA, either in its entirety or a part of it, was the least common basis for selection. The whole of the NRA was employed by just over one-

Table 3:2 Methods used for selecting the right person for the job (per cent)[1]

Selection methods	All	Specific occupation		
		Management/ professional	Non-manual	Manual
Performance in interview	97	94	98	94
The applicant's CV	87	81	88	82
A letter of application	87	84	87	84
A completed application form	85	84	80	88
Reference	83	84	85	80
Skill tests	43	38	46	42
Personality/intelligence tests	39	44	38	37
The whole of the applicant's NRA	33	25	39	27
Part of the applicant's NRA	9	13	7	11
Other	9	9	11	8
N = whole sample (multiple responses allowed)	*487*	*32*	*175*	*142*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

third of employers, and nine per cent used a part of it. Usage of the whole of the NRA is higher for those recruiting to non-manual than manual positions, and is lowest for those recruiting to managerial or professional posts. In particular, when recruiting graduate management trainees, the whole recruitment process may be different. We found no employers who had come across a graduate with an NRA. Respondents were also asked if there were any other methods used. Responses given included appearance, attendance record and medical report.

Clearly, employers used a range of different methods for recruiting employees. The most common combination of methods was an interview, CV, letter of application, application form and a reference; sometimes with an NRA, skill and personality tests being used additionally. We have found that those employers who use an applicant's NRA are slightly more likely to make use of all the other selection methods, compared with non-NRA users. These data reflect previous research which shows that nearly all employers who looked at the NRA still used an application form additionally, and only 15 per cent of employers would even consider using the NRA instead of their selection procedures (Research International, 1993a). We found no cases of the NRA being used in isolation.

[1] The NRA use figures shown in Table 3:2. Figures are lower than those presented in Table 2:5. This is because in Table 3:2 we are only referring to methods used for the jobs employers recruit to most frequently.

We outlined in Chapter 2 that NRA use increased with involvement with the Investors in People initiative. Only one-quarter of those not involved in Investors in People used the NRA in recruitment. Employers in this group were also less likely to use application forms; 76 per cent looked at completed application forms. They were also more likely to have made use of CVs than those involved in Investors in People.

Analysis of our sample by frequency of recruiting young people shows that use of NRAs, application forms and CVs all increase the more regularly they recruit. Interviewing also increases with this variable, although all of the employers who never recruited young people used this method.

These results were generally confirmed by our findings from the face-to-face interviews which we conducted. An application form, followed by an interview, and sometimes skill tests in addition, appears to be the standard method for recruiting young people, in particular among the larger employers. In almost all cases where the NRA was used, it was looked at at the interview stage and was rarely posted to a prospective employer in advance. Some employers did not use an application form when recruiting young people. These were most likely to be employers who shortlisted from lists provided by the Careers Service, Jobcentre or a training provider, and were often those recruiting for Youth Training positions. It was felt that these agencies knew the type of young people sought by the employer. One employer in particular felt that application forms were inappropriate for school leavers:

> *'I believe application forms discriminate against young people who are no good at filling them in — I can get all this information out of them*

Table 3:3 Methods used for selecting the right person for the job (per cent)

Selection methods	All	NRA recruitment use	
		Users	Non-users
Performance in interview	97	98	96
The applicant's CV	87	88	86
A letter of application	87	87	87
A completed application form	85	89	82
Reference	83	86	82
Skill tests	43	47	40
Personality/intelligence tests	39	41	38
The whole of the applicant's NRA	33	80	–
Part of the applicant's NRA	9	21	–
Other	9	13	5
N = whole sample (multiple responses allowed)	*487*	*204*	*283*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

in an interview.'

Reasons for using CVs instead of application forms, included CVs allowing applicants to express themselves more freely. Another reason mentioned was an inability to produce a standard form which would be appropriate for the wide range of jobs at the workplace.

The kind of tests that were used were generally simple literacy and numeracy tests. Those employers who were looking for specific skills used tests such as typing tests or manual dexterity tests for machine operatives. Some of the larger employers with more highly developed recruitment practices used tests such as motivation questionnaires and perception exercises. A trial period was used by a small minority of employers; this was generally among those recruiting to specialised occupations. One employer found it useful to meet the parents of young recruits.

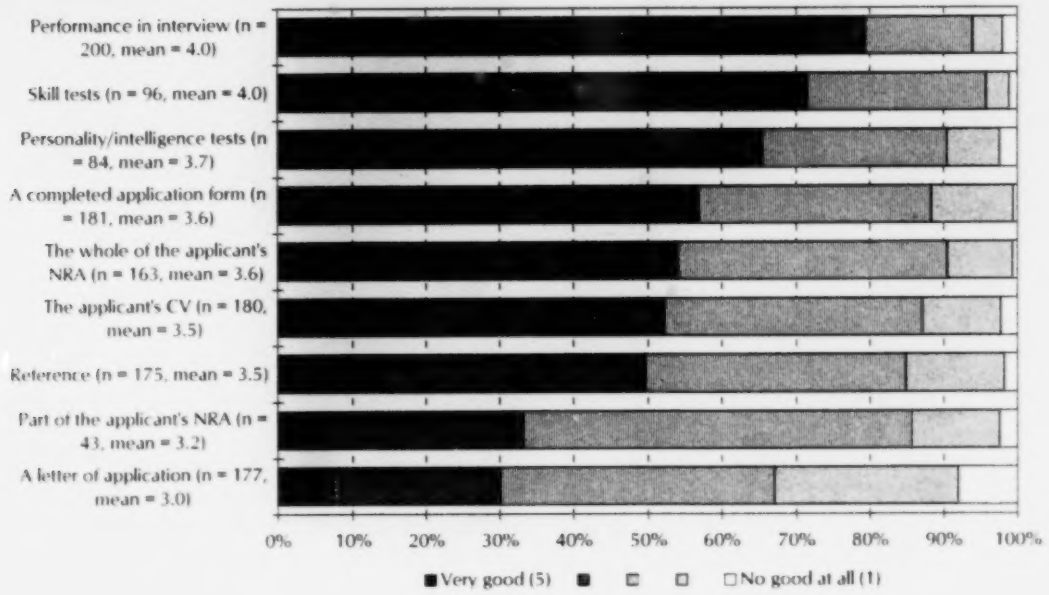
3.1.3 Employers' opinions of selection methods used

Having established the selection methods used, we wanted to find out how employers rated each one and how the NRA compared with other techniques. Our respondents were asked how good each method that they used was, as an indicator of an applicant's suitability for the job in question. Each technique was scored on a scale of one to five, with one meaning 'no good at all' and five 'very good'. Clearly, employers use a combination of methods to select recruits, and some respondents found it difficult to isolate the effectiveness of each one. Furthermore, each tool to aid selection has different merits and those used are likely to complement each other. As the participants of the second stage of the research confirmed: 'it is this whole process in conjunction which provides a good indication of suitability for the job'. Thus, it may not be appropriate to compare certain methods with others. However, our findings do provide an illustration of how the NRA is rated in comparison with other methods.

Employers who use the NRA

To provide insight into how the NRA compares with other methods of selection, the responses from NRA users to this question are summarised in Figure 3:1, and from non-users in Figure 3:2. For each of the bars in the figures, the base is the number of respondents who use this selection technique. It is clear that performance in interview is not only the most frequently used method, it is also seen by those who use it as providing the best indication of suitability for the job. No doubt this is why it is used so widely. Respondents generally felt an interview was essential when recruiting young people to provide an idea of how the recruit would fit in. One employer in particular looked for appearance, body language and cleanliness.

Figure 3:1 How good selection methods used are as indicators of applicants' suitability for the job (NRA users only)


Performance in interview (n = 200, mean = 4.0)
Skill tests (n = 96, mean = 4.0)
Personality/intelligence tests (n = 84, mean = 3.7)
A completed application form (n = 181, mean = 3.6)
The whole of the applicant's NRA (n = 163, mean = 3.6)
The applicant's CV (n = 180, mean = 3.5)
Reference (n = 175, mean = 3.5)
Part of the applicant's NRA (n = 43, mean = 3.2)
A letter of application (n = 177, mean = 3.0)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very good (5)
No good at all (1)

Note: The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score.

Source: IES Survey, 1996

Performance in interview, skill, personality and intelligence tests were all considered to provide a better indication of an individual's suitability for a job than the NRA, by those who use these tools.

The NRA was generally used to complement other selection methods. It can help young people write a CV, letter of application, or application form, and present themselves at an interview. The advantages of using an NRA are illustrated by the following comments:

> *'The NRA highlights their strengths and skills and the out-of-school activities they are involved in. If they are heavily into sports or involved in youth organisations, you know they are not likely to be hanging around street corners.'*

> *'The NRA adds to the story and provides a different dimension.'*

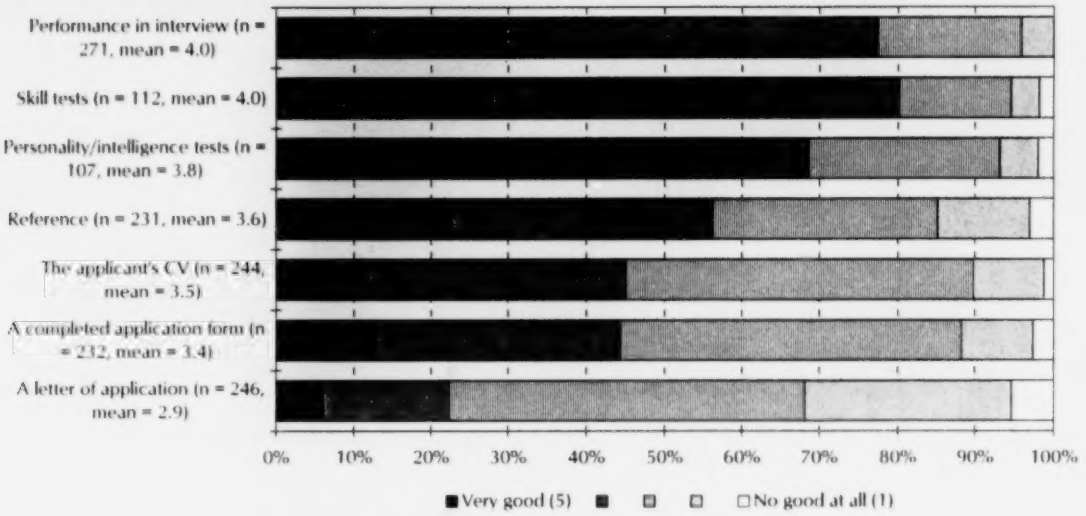
> *'The NRA presents in a tidy format what an individual may have forgotten to tell you at the interview.'*

For one employer in particular, the validation of an NRA was especially useful:

> *'The NRA cannot be falsified, whereas application forms can be.'*

In some cases, the NRA is used in place of taking up references. However, other employers still saw the need for a confidential reference from school.

Figure 3:2 How good selection methods used are as indicators of applicants' suitability for the job (NRA non-users only)


Performance in interview (n = 271, mean = 4.0)
Skill tests (n = 112, mean = 4.0)
Personality/intelligence tests (n = 107, mean = 3.8)
Reference (n = 231, mean = 3.6)
The applicant's CV (n = 244, mean = 3.5)
A completed application form (n = 232, mean = 3.4)
A letter of application (n = 246, mean = 2.9)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very good (5)
No good at all (1)

Note: The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score.

Source: IES Survey, 1996

The NRA versus application forms

It is interesting to note that our results show that the NRA is given a very similar rating to a completed application form. We have found that the relative value of NRAs and application forms depends upon the type of application form that an employer uses. One respondent found the NRA very much better than a completed form, because they used a simple basic form which only covered personal details and employment history:

> *'For school leavers, the employment history bit will be left blank. The NRA is very much better for individuals without GCSEs in particular.'*

Another survey of NRA users asked a similar question about confidence in tools to aid selection, although use of interviews was not included in the question (Research International, 1993a). This survey also found that employers had the greatest confidence in tests. However, in this study, application forms were rated above the NRA. Advantages of application forms over the NRA may be that application forms are designed for a specific company whereas the individual has decided the content of the NRA, although within a common format. Application forms were also regarded as concise and easy to compare. Among our interviewees, we also found examples of employers who required an application form because of the specific information they contained, such as declaration of convictions. Interviewees found it difficult comparing an NRA with an application form. An important point to note is that application forms serve a different purpose to the NRA, as one employer explained: 'the

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application form provides a formal record of personal details, whereas the NRA presents broader information on an individual's experience'. There is therefore not really a comparison to be made between NRAs and application forms. A view which came out strongly from our research was that the NRA should be used in conjunction with other selection methods and should not be seen as being able to replace them.

> *'The NRA is a supporting document to the application form; the application form needs to be specific to the company. The NRA does not really give a full picture, you need to see them face-to-face as well. The NRA is a working document to be used alongside these other methods, not instead of.'*

We found one example of an employer with an application form designed for young people to complete with the NRA in mind, providing instructions on how to draw out evidence supporting the application from the NRA. The NRA is thus a necessary component in a job application, rather than a selection tool to be used in isolation. It complements other selection methods and enables individuals to meet the requirements employers place upon them in the selection process.

The NRA versus a CV

As shown in Figure 3:1, NRAs were rated slightly higher than CVs as indicators for suitability for the job. The following quotes provide an indication of the relative merits of NRAs and CVs for young people:

> *'CVs are very formularised — they all say very much the same thing.'*

> *'The NRA is a better indicator than a CV for those with no work experience.'*

> *'We rate CVs and NRAs about the same if it's a good CV, but young people's CVs are not always good.'*

> *'A CV is not a very effective recruitment tool for young people coming straight from school. The way they write a covering letter is a better indicator; it gives an idea of how they string words together, their spelling and grammar.'*

> *'The NRA is in a better format than a CV. CVs can be quite rushed sometimes; there is more in an NRA than a CV.'*

One particular advantage of a CV over an NRA that was mentioned, however, was that a CV is less cumbersome when keeping speculative applications on file. It was felt to be completely inappropriate to use an NRA in this way.

Employers who do not use the NRA

Figure 3:2 shows how recruiters who do not use the NRA rate each of the practices. The most striking element of these results

is the similarity with NRA users' views. The only slight difference lies between ratings of application forms. Those who do not use the NRA give a higher rating to application forms, but again, the rating of an application form will vary according to the type of form used. NRA non-users give a slightly higher rating to references than users, which may indicate that the NRA is substituted for references.

3.1.4 How the NRA is used in the recruitment process

Our research, as well as previous studies, has found that although there is very little use made by employers of the NRA prior to interview, the document is useful as a discussion tool during interviews, and provides a rounded picture of the candidate (Research International 1993a). The following comments illustrate the usefulness of an NRA during an interview:

> *'An interview is a very daunting experience for a school leaver; they do not readily open up. The NRA is a useful tool to get the discussion going.'*

> *'It is a good talking point for the interview — many young people have not had a job interview before. They are nervous and not always good at selling themselves. The NRA gives me a way to find out what the person is really like — are they tidy or messy, diligent or lazy, enthusiastic? The way the folder is kept, and the things they put in there, all give clues to what the person is like.'*

> *'When you glance through it at interview it gives you something to latch onto, you find out more about them. The advantage of using the NRA is that it helps open up questions. It has more information than a basic application form and a lot more time is spent, and thought put into, preparing an NRA.'*

We found that recruiters use the NRA in an interview by flicking through the document during the interview or by asking the applicant to run through it. Interviewers knowing what to look for, and being familiar with NRAs to pick out the relevant information, seemed to be important factors in enabling this to work effectively. Examples of how the NRA is used during interviews are presented below:

> *'At the latter part of the interview, we ask for the NRA; we skim it very quickly. We can't read it word for word, but you can take in a lot by skimming.'*

> *'Half way through the interview we ask for the NRA — one interviewer looks at it while the other asks questions.'*

> *'We ask for them to be brought along to the interview and speed read them before they enter the room.'*

> *'One looks at it while the other asks questions, but this would be more difficult if there was only one interviewer.'*

One employer noted that:

'There can be an embarrassing silence while I thumb through it.'

However, another structured the whole interview around the NRA and found it particularly useful in this respect.

3.2 Selection criteria

A key objective of this study was to find out about how the NRA is used in the recruitment process. In selection, managers take into account a wide range of criteria, attach different weights to them and assess them in various ways. We wanted to assess:

- how important particular attributes were
- whether the NRA was used to assess this, and
- how well the NRA expressed the attribute in question.

The results are shown in the three parts of Table 3:4 below.

3.2.1 Importance of selection criteria

Respondents were asked to specify how important were the criteria from a read-out list, when choosing a recruit. The first part of Table 3:4 shows the degree of importance attached to each. Again, for 95 per cent of our sample, these responses relate to the job to which young people are most frequently recruited. The remaining five per cent of respondents who do not recruit young people were referring to the post to which they most frequently recruited overall.

On the basis of these findings it can be seen that:

- reliability, honesty, motivation and attitude were rated as very or fairly important criteria by a very large majority of respondents
- basic skills (*ie* literacy, numeracy and communication skills), inter-personal skills, health and fitness, were also considered to be very or fairly important by a significant majority of employers
- of the least importance generally, were vocational qualifications, work experience, educational qualifications and problem solving skills, with around, or less than, half of respondents considering these to be very or fairly important.

The criteria most commonly cited in the face-to-face interviews also largely related to personal attributes such as enthusiasm, initiative, self confidence, motivation and willingness to learn. Basic literacy, numeracy, IT and communications skills were also important.

Table 3:4 Abilities and attributes looked for in recruits and the NRA, as a source of information

Abilities and attributes	Importance of the ability/attribute		NRA as a source of information for the ability/attribute		How well the NRA conveys the ability/attribute		
	Very/fairly important	Mean score	Use of the NRA		Very/fairly well		Mean score
	%		%	N	%	N	
Reliability/honesty	95.5	4.7	61.7	230	41.5	142	3.3
Motivation/attitude	93.8	4.5	65.1	232	47.7	151	3.4
Basic skills *ie* literacy, numeracy, oral communication skills	82.3	4.2	75.3	227	56.1	171	3.7
Inter-personal skills	76.0	4.0	58.3	223	44.6	130	3.4
Health/fitness	71.5	4.0	49.6	224	36.0	111	3.1
Vocational qualifications	53.6	3.6	72.8	213	64.5	155	3.8
Work experience	54.4	3.5	73.0	200	64.4	146	3.8
Educational qualifications	44.2	3.4	79.3	193	69.3	153	3.9
Problem solving skills	42.7	3.3	46.2	186	27.9	86	3.2
N =	*487 (all respondents)*		*NRA users who consider the criterion to be very/fairly important*		*NRA users who consider the criterion to be very/fairly important and use the NRA as a source of information for the ability/attribute*		

Note: The nearer the mean score is to five, the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score.

Source: IES Survey, 1996

There was little variation in the importance of these criteria according to frequency of recruiting young people. In relation to the specific type of job, those recruiting to manual jobs were more likely to put more importance on motivation, reliability and honesty. Manual dexterity was important when recruiting to jobs such as machine operatives and hairdressing. In contrast, those recruiting to non-manual, professional or managerial posts placed more importance on educational and vocational qualifications, basic skills, problem solving skills and work experience. Being customer focused and able to initiate conversations with customers was an important criterion in sales and hotel occupations.

3.2.2 NRA use as a source for the selection criteria

In order to provide some insight into how the NRA is used in the recruitment process, for each of the abilities and attributes listed in Table 3:4, we asked respondents who said they considered the criterion very or fairly important, and who used the NRA, whether they used the NRA as a source of information

for that particular ability or attribute. Our findings are presented in the second part of Table 3:4 and are summarised below.

- The NRA is generally used as a source of information on the more tangible criteria such as educational qualifications, vocational qualifications and work experience. As we outlined above, these three criteria were considered to be the least important by our respondents overall. However, we also found that a major strength of the NRA was that it provided a wider range of information other than academic achievements.
- Basic skills appears to be another area for which the NRA is used as a source of information by a significant proportion (75.3 per cent) of NRA users who consider these skills important.
- The NRA seems to be used to some extent to provide information on reliability, honesty, motivation and attitude. Over 60 per cent of the respondents to the question used the NRA as a source for these attributes.
- The NRA is used less as a source of information on interpersonal skills, health and fitness, and problem solving skills.

Comparisons between those recruiting to non-manual and manual occupations show little difference on the extent to which they use the NRA for these criteria. For manual occupations, the NRA is used slightly more for motivation and health and fitness, and less for basic skills.

3.2.3 How well the NRA conveys the selection criteria

Respondents who considered each of the criteria either very or fairly important and who used the NRA as a source of information for the particular abilities or attributes, were asked how well they considered the ability or attribute to be conveyed in the NRA. Our findings to this part of the question are presented in the third part of Table 3:4 and in summary below.

- The results suggest that the NRA is most useful in conveying the more tangible abilities and attributes, namely vocational and educational qualifications, work experience and basic skills. Our findings suggest that the NRA is particularly useful in providing verification of the qualifications held.
- The criteria generally considered to be the most important — reliability, honesty, motivation and attitude — were felt to be conveyed very or fairly well by the NRA by less than half of the respondents to the question.
- Health, fitness and problem solving skills appear to be the criteria least well conveyed by the NRA.

These findings suggest that the NRA is less effective at providing the information about young people which is most important to employers. The NRA does, however, appear to provide a

general indication of an applicant's character. Respondents found that you can pick up information about personal attributes from the NRA through the activities that applicants are involved in, such as school plays and societies. If they are involved in sports, for example, it may suggest that they are a team player. One employer gave examples of the kind of things they look for in an NRA:

> *'I look for evidence of additional involvement, eg Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme or similar sorts of things, such as Scouts, Guides or other forms of community involvement. I am interested in examples of: working with others (eg baby sitting); working in teams and for doing something for other people. I also want to see involvement with other people, and taking responsibility and leadership, eg being a prefect. Anything that demonstrates potential for progression is useful.'*

In contrast, another employer felt that an individual's enthusiasm does not necessarily come across in the NRA:

> *'Just because they have a lot of certificates does not mean they will show initiative. This comes across more in the way they talk about things in the interview.'*

The manner in which the NRA is presented and the extent to which the individual is proud of it, can sometimes provide as much an indicator of personal attributes as its content.

To provide an indication of basic numeracy and literacy, one employer found reports on Maths and English particularly useful. Teacher reports generally were found to provide useful information on personal attributes. One employer found that typed up NRAs give an indication of typing skills; also, how much work has been put into drawing up the NRA is a useful indicator. However, this may be a reflection of how much the school has promoted and supported the NRA, rather than the individual. The NRA was found to be less good at demonstrating an interest in a particular industry and career ambitions. In relation to specific skills such as manual dexterity, the NRA was thought to provide some clues, for example, in hairdressing experience in needlework is useful, but this respondent suggested that a trial period was needed to get a true idea of aptitude for the job. An employer recruiting assembly workers felt that:

> *'If they say they are heavily into electronics or engineering, it can give me an idea of their interest in the job and their dexterity, but I need to read between the lines. What I am looking for is a bit specialist.'*

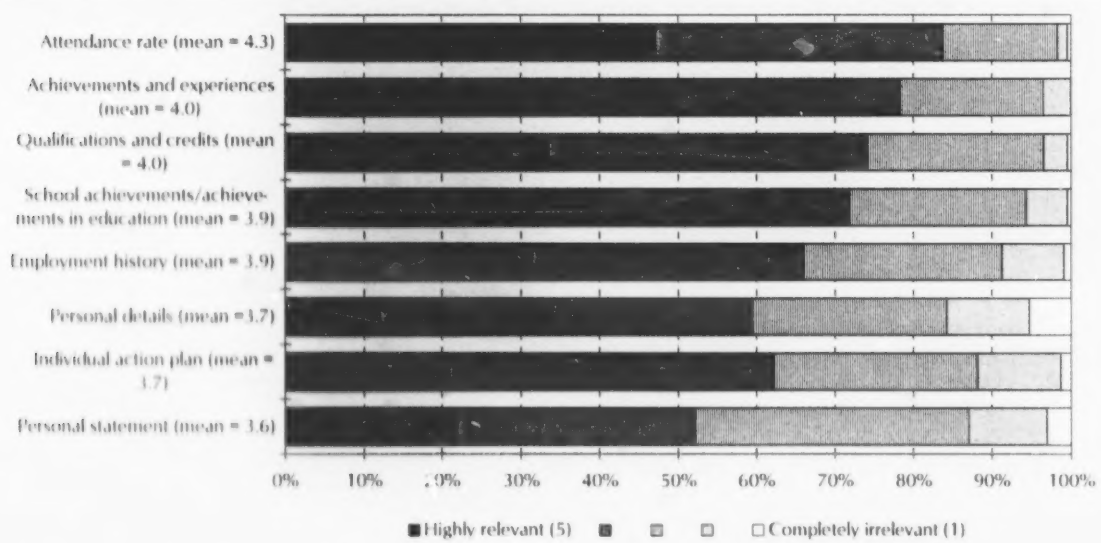
Employers look for evidence in the NRA of skills, attributes and achievements. References, work experience, teacher reports and certificates, are all found to be useful. In terms of quality assurance, employers are most concerned that what is said in the NRA is true. Thus, it needs to be authenticated and backed up by evidence.

3.3 Relevance of the pages of the NRA

To further provide an indication of how the NRA is used in the recruitment process, we asked our employers who used the NRA how relevant each of the sections of the NRA were. Before discussing the results to this question, we briefly outline the content of each page of the NRA below.

- **Attendance rate** is a summary of attendance during the last year at an educational establishment. A teacher will provide the information to be entered on this sheet.
- **Personal details** provides details such as name, address, age and a summary of education and training history.
- **Achievements in education** is a summary of achievements and progress in each subject, or area of activity, that may be being followed in full- or part-time education or training. If the individual is in school, a teacher will discuss and support the information to be entered on this sheet.
- **Qualifications and credits** lists the type of qualification, awarding body, level, or result and date achieved for all qualifications held. Certificates may also be stored in this part of the NRA.
- **Achievements and experiences** is a section for a summary of core skills, personal qualities, and other achievements and experiences not recorded elsewhere.
- **Personal statement** provides an opportunity to make an overall statement on achievements.

Figure 3:3 Relevance of the pages of the NRA



Note: The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score.

Base: N = 235 Users of the NRA in recruitment.

Source: IES Survey, 1996

- **Employment history** is a summary of full- and part-time employment.
- **Individual action plan** is structured around a review of where the individual is now, goals, targets and arrangements and may be developed with the support of a teacher, careers adviser, trainer, manager or colleague.

Respondents to the survey were asked to rate the relevance on a scale of one to five, with one meaning completely irrelevant and five, highly relevant. The findings are presented in Figure 3:3.

The most important point to note from Figure 3:3 is that all sections of the document were seen as either fairly relevant or highly relevant by at least half of the NRA users. This closely corresponds with results from a previous survey to a question on helpfulness of each of the pages at the application and interview stages of recruitment (Research International 1993a). However, Research International's respondents clearly found the action plan least helpful in interviews. This limited variation in the scoring for each page may reflect a lack of discrimination between, or in-depth knowledge of, each of the pages. However, we have found that those who claimed to have a good understanding of the NRA also gave broadly similar scores to each of the sections of the NRA. Furthermore, an important finding from the face-to-face interviews was that the whole document is useful to employers, not specific pages. In some NRAs, some pages are more useful than others, but this varies by individual. A strong view coming through from employers was that it would be detrimental to one and not to another if only certain pages were sent in.

> *'You have to look at the whole thing. It is all relevant and there's no point focusing on one page more than any other — you cannot tell what pages are useful until you see each one.'*

Perhaps reflecting the importance our employers place upon reliability, honesty, motivation and attitude, the attendance rate was considered highly relevant by 46 per cent of employers who had used the NRA in recruitment, and fairly relevant by a further 35.7 per cent. However, one employer found that the attendance record can be difficult to interpret: just because an individual had attended registration did not necessarily mean they had attended all classes. Achievements and experiences were viewed as a relevant, or highly relevant, section of the NRA by 77 per cent of NRA users.

Other parts of the NRA which were generally seen as key were qualifications and credits, and school achievements in education and employment history. As we have already noted, employers tend to check the certificates in the NRA. This may be explained by our finding that although qualifications and work experience are viewed as being very or fairly well conveyed in the NRA by around two-thirds of NRA users, they are not considered to be

as important as personal attributes, such as reliability and basic skills, when selecting a recruit. Employer reports from work experience were found to be useful as were teacher reports. As we have already noted, these school reports often replaced the need to take up references. They can provide valuable insights into an individual's personality, for example, the extent to which they contribute in class. However, there appears to be some variation in the extent to which these are included in NRAs. Furthermore, one employer found that teacher reports did not necessarily provide an accurate picture of how an individual would perform at work and they could be very subjective.

Personal details and the individual action plan were scored slightly lower in terms of relevance. We may expect the individual action plan to have a lower relevance to employers in recruitment, as its role is more as a tool for individuals to take greater control of their education, training and career. This is the most private element of the NRA and we may not expect individuals to present this to a prospective employer. In fact, of the employers who were interviewed, few had actually seen an NRA with an action plan.

We may have expected the personal details to have greater relevance to employers in that, to some extent, it provides a summary of the individual's experiences but, in fact, this statement received the lowest mean score of relevance from employers. This finding may indicate that any such statement needs to be geared towards a specific application to a specific job to be useful to an employer, and again, that the section has more relevance to the individual than a potential recruiter. Perhaps to some extent contradicting the results from the telephone survey, one employer found the personal statement the most useful part. This may again suggest that for some individuals certain pages of the NRA are more useful than others, and it is difficult to generalise:

> *'The most useful part is the personal statement, although a problem with it is that it can be out of date. For instance if we see them at 18, rather than 16, after they have been at college for a year, then it is not up to date.'*

Consistency in what is provided in an NRA appears generally to be an issue, and as one employer explained: 'it can often be as interesting to see what is missing from some as what is in them'.

> *'It seems what is presented in the NRA is not consistent in different areas and from different individuals; some may leave bits out if they do not have a good report.'*

3.4 Reasons for not using the NRA in recruitment

Having discussed the views of our respondents who had some experience of using the NRA in recruitment, we now focus upon

Table 3:5 Reasons for not using the NRA in recruitment

Reasons	All		Recruitment of young people				
	Very /fairly significant reason		Never	Rarely	Occas-ionally	Most years	Every year
	%	Mean score	Mean score	Mean score	Mean score	Mean score	Mean score
Few/no applicants offer them	69.0	4.1	5.0	4.1	4.1	4.5	3.8
Prefer to use in-company forms	54.9	3.4	2.5	3.7	3.5	3.2	3.6
The NRA contains too much/irrelevant information	17.6	2.7	3.0	2.4	2.6	2.8	2.7
The NRA doesn't contain the necessary information	15.5	2.7	1.8	2.5	2.9	2.3	2.8
N = aware non-users of the NRA (multiple responses allowed)	*142*		*8*	*19*	*24*	*26*	*61*

Note: The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score.

Source: IES Survey, 1996

those employers who had a reasonable awareness of the NRA but had not used it in the recruitment process.

Respondents were asked how significant a prompted list of reasons were for not using the NRA. As we show in Table 3:5, applicants not offering, or not having, an NRA is the most significant reason for employers not using the NRA in recruitment. Evidence from the face-to-face interviews suggest that employers did not use the NRA because so few people have them, and those that have do not keep them up to date. As we noted in Chapter 3, our findings suggests usage of the NRA varies across schools and districts. This finding further illustrates that NRA usage is generally supply-side led. As would be expected, this reason increased the less regularly young people are recruited, and was a very significant reason for all those who never recruited young people. For one employer, in particular, using the NRA presented an equal opportunities issue:

> *I am not sure how widely the NRA is used by schools, and it is this lack of certainty that makes me wary of the NRA. It could disadvantage young people who do not have an NRA or whose schools do not help them complete them properly. As an equal opportunities employer, we go out of our way not to place needless requirements or hurdles in the way of applicants, and the NRA could present a potentially discriminatory hurdle.'*

Over half of our non-users said that preferring to use in-company forms was either a fairly or very significant reason for not using the NRA in the application stage of recruitment. This reason is most significant for those who recruit young people every year. Thus, these employers may well have come across the NRA through their applicants but have chosen not to use it. This finding contrasts with the NRA being scored slightly higher

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Table 3:6 Other reasons for not using the NRA in recruitment (unprompted) (per cent)

Reasons	All
Lack of awareness/no publicity/lack of knowledge	11
Few recruits of that age/NRA is for school leaves	7
NRA not often presented	5
Doesn't include relevant on suitability for the job	3
Lack of credibility/not proven successful yet	2
Satisfied with current systems	2
Others	6
No other reason	64
N = aware non-users of the NRA (multiple responses allowed)	*142*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

as an indicator of applicants' suitability for the job than a completed application form, as shown in Table 3:2, by NRA users.

The NRA containing too much or irrelevant information, or not containing the necessary information, were generally not important reasons for not using it.

Our respondents were asked if there were any other reasons for not using the NRA and almost two-thirds of our non-users were able to give other reasons. As shown in Table 3:6, in answer to this question, just over ten per cent mentioned that they did not know enough about the NRA. Other unprompted reasons were that they did not recruit many young applicants, or that they recruited graduates rather than school leavers. A small number of employees mentioned a lack of credibility, or the NRA not having been proved successful as yet (Table 3:6).

One employer did not use NRAs because of a lack of time to look through it during an interview and also found difficulty interpreting the NRA:

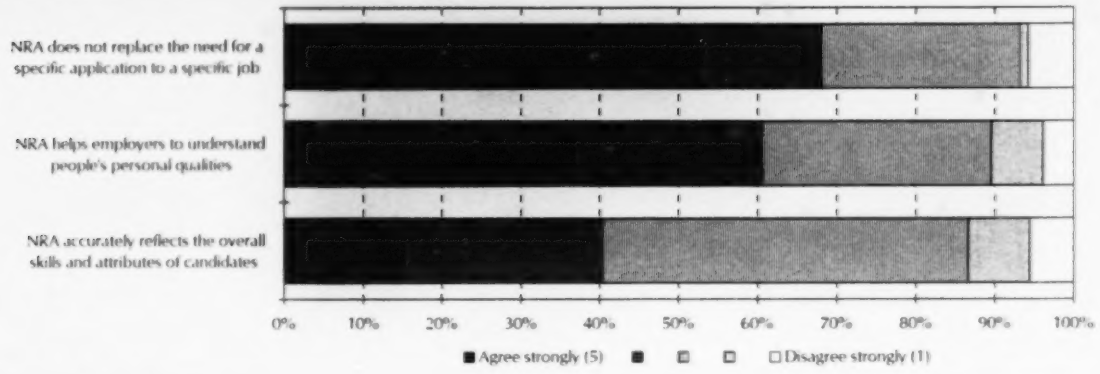
> *'It sounds as if appropriate phrases are picked out and there is a danger that you feel you have read it before. Kids are fitted into certain boxes, but some do not fit; there is no room for free expression of what the individual is like. You either need explanatory notes about what the standard phrases used actually mean, or there should be scope to write more freely about the person.'*

It seems that employers need to have seen a few NRAs before they can skim through them and pick out the relevant bits at an interview effectively.

3.5 Attitudes towards the NRA as a recruitment tool

In order to assess overall attitudes to the NRA, a series of agree/disagree statements about the NRA were asked of all aware

Figure 3:4 Employers' attitudes towards the NRA as a recruitment tool



Source: IES Survey, 1996, 1996

respondents (Figure 3:4). We now discuss those relating to recruitment within the context of the above discussion.

Two-thirds of our respondents who were aware of the NRA agreed with the statement that the NRA does not replace the need for a specific application to a specific job. We also noted above that for our non-users of the NRA, preferring to use in-company forms is a significant reason for not using the document. This may reflect our finding that the NRA users also use application forms. Previous research has found little scope for the NRA to replace application forms. It has also been found by this research and previous studies, that the NRA has less of a role in the application stage, but is more useful when brought along to interviews as a base for discussion (Research International, 1993a).

Employers were asked whether they agreed with the statement that the NRA helps employers to understand people's personal qualities, and over half (58 per cent) did so. However, only 39 per cent agreed that the NRA accurately reflects the overall skills and attributes of candidates, thus perhaps limiting its scope to be used in the recruitment process. The main advantages of the NRA were that it gives employers a rounded view of applicants, the ability for the young person to marshal their thoughts and sell themselves. However, employers found it limited in the information it can provide in terms of aptitude for doing the job. In Chapter 6, we discuss potential for future use, and employers' views on changes which could be made in order to make the NRA more useful.

3.6 Summary

Respondents were asked about their procedures when recruiting to the kinds of jobs young people are most likely to take up.

- Interviews, CVs, letters of application, application forms and references were the most commonly used tools to aid selection. Almost all of the employers who had used the NRA during

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recruitment also interviewed applicants. Our results suggest that the NRA is not substituted for other methods of selection. There is little difference between NRA users' and non-users' utilisation of application forms, letters of application and references.

- Performance in interviews, tests of skill, personality and intelligence were thought to provide the best indication of an applicant's suitability for a job. However, employers often felt it was not appropriate to consider the effectiveness of each tool in isolation.
- The NRA was generally used to complement other selection methods and the predominant view was that it should not be seen as being able to replace them. The NRA is used most commonly to aid discussion at an interview.
- Reliability, honesty, motivation and attitude were the most important attributes employers look for when recruiting to the types of jobs in which they most commonly employ young people. Qualifications and work experience were seen as much less important.
- The NRA was used as a source of information on the tangible criteria such as qualifications and work experience, and was seen as conveying these attributes best. Employers generally felt that the more important attributes, *ie* reliability and attitude, were not well conveyed in the NRA.
- All the pages of the NRA were seen as relevant. However, the attendance rate was viewed as most relevant. Employers found the document in its entirety was useful; the usefulness of specific pages varies by individual.
- The main reason for not using the NRA in recruitment is that few, or no, applicants offer them. Other reasons included preferring to use in-company forms, and a lack of sufficient knowledge about the NRA.
- Almost two-thirds of aware employers felt that the NRA could not be substituted for a specific application to a specific job. In general, the view of our employers was that the NRA helps employers to understand people's personal qualities but it does not accurately reflect the overall skills and attributes of prospective recruits.

4. Training and Development, and Use of the NRA

This chapter is concerned with employer approaches to identifying individual training and development needs, and how the NRA fits into these practices. In terms of staff development, the NRA aims to facilitate the evaluation and planning of business, and individual training needs. At the individual level, the purpose of the NRA is to identify areas in need of development and steps to improve performance.

The chapter begins by considering the appraisal and development practices used by employers, and the extent of use of the NRA. We then move on to discuss how the NRA fits with these schemes and the benefits of using it in these procedures. The limitations of the NRA and reasons for not using it for reviewing individual training and development needs are also discussed. We conclude by providing an assessment of our employers' attitudes towards the NRA as a tool for reviewing and planning individual training and development.

4.1 Employer approaches to training and methods used to identify individual training and development needs

Our respondents were asked a number of questions to assess the sophistication of their practices for reviewing and planning individual training and development needs. These related to their:

- overall approach to training
- methods used to identify individual training and development needs, and
- formal documents used in this process.

Those employers who did not train much, did not have any methods for identifying training and development needs, and did not use any formal documents, were not asked any further questions to do with training and development. This was to filter out all employers with relatively unsophisticated training arrangements, to whom the NRA would have no relevance.

In order to get an impression of our respondents' approaches to training, employers were asked which of the three statements shown in Table 4:1 best described their approach. A high proportion (79 per cent) stated that they systematically planned to

Table 4:1 Approach to training (per cent)

Approach to training	All	Employment size			Investors in People status		
		6-49	50-199	200+	Not involved	Committed	Achieved
We systematically plan to meet the training needs of all or most employees	79	77	79	83	62	77	90
We do not formally plan training but do train when we see a need for it	19	21	18	17	30	23	9
We tend to recruit ready trained people and do not train much ourselves	2	2	2	–	8	–	2
N = whole sample	*487*	*175*	*163*	*149*	*50*	*244*	*164*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

meet the training needs of all or most employees. Only two per cent said they did not train much themselves. The proportion of employers who systematically planned increased with size of employer and, as we would hope to be true, with involvement in Investors in People.

In terms of methods used to plan and review individual training and development needs, respondents were asked which from a list of methods they used. A high proportion (86 per cent) of respondents used performance appraisals. We have devised a system of categorising responding organisations according to the sophistication of their response to the identification of the individual's training and development needs. This variable was designed to provide an insight into employers' use and opinions of the NRA, which we consider later in the chapter. In designing the categories, a score was attributed to each of the methods a respondent used to identify the training and development needs of individual employees. These ranged from zero for assessing training needs on an *ad hoc* basis, to six for conducting training audits and developing special training plans. This categorisation according to employer size is shown in Table 4:2. Of the employers visited, we included a wide range in terms of the degree of sophistication of their individual training and development systems. This was in order to get an idea of how the NRA might fit with, or enhance, those systems in place.

As we have shown in Chapter 2, only nine per cent of our sample had used the NRA for training or development (this figure includes those who mentioned the NRA spontaneously, as well as those asked directly if they use the NRA). The face-to-face interview stage of this project found that use of the NRA in this way was even more limited than these figures suggest. We have also found that users of the NRA were more likely to use other formal methods for training and development planning and review. Of the telephone survey respondents who said they used

Table 4:2 Sophistication of approach to training (per cent)

Sophistication of approach to training and development	All	Employment size			Investors in People status		
		6-49	50-199	200+	Not involved	Committed	Achieved
Low	28	33	25	25	36	29	22
Medium	36	38	41	30	28	39	37
High	36	29	35	46	36	33	42
N = whole sample	*487*	*175*	*163*	*149*	*50*	*244*	*164*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

the NRA, 58 per cent fell into the high banding of the sophistication of approach categorisation, and only 12 per cent into the low category. However, we need to be cautious in our analysis of this sub-set of employers, due to the small numbers involved.

Of those who used the NRA for identifying training needs, virtually all (96 per cent) also used appraisals, and three-quarters used training audits. Furthermore, 89 per cent of these users used individual training plans. Among the employers who used the NRA for development purposes, 92 per cent used appraisals, 64 per cent used career counselling and guidance, and 75 per cent used personal development plans. Thus, the NRA is clearly not being used instead of, but rather in addition to, other methods for reviewing individual employer training and development, as illustrated by the following response:

> *'We use the NRA to discuss training issues but alongside other appraisal procedures.'*

We asked those employers who used the NRA for these purposes whether they adapted the document for their own purposes. Over one-third (39 per cent) said they used it as it is produced nationally, and 36 per cent said they adapted it. Half of those who said they adapted it said they extracted the relevant information. It is rare for the NRA to be used on a formal basis. In some cases, it was used to inform employers who were developing their own systems, but generally it was used informally for selected employees.

These tended to be recent young recruits or those on Modern Apprenticeship programmes. Employers may provide some encouragement to employees to update their NRA:

> *'We encourage individuals to update their work experience and feed information from their appraisals into their NRAs, but the extent to which this happens depends on individual managers.'*

In some cases, information in the NRA was used to feed into the company's individual training plan at an initial training needs assessment, as illustrated by the following comments:

'For new recruits, we tell them to look at their NRA and see if there are any areas where they can build on things they have done previously, either in or out of school.'

'When young people start, the head of department sits down with them and goes through the NRA. If perhaps specific skills are missing, we feed that into their individual training record.'

The NRA tended only to be used for young people and it is unusual for an employer to look at it after an initial assessment. Most employers felt it was up to the individual whether they updated their NRA or not. The view was that the document belongs to the individual, not the company.

'The NRA is their portfolio; the onus is on the individual to complete it.'

'My role is to encourage, rather than require, that the NRA is updated.'

4.2 Benefits of using the NRA for reviewing individual training or development needs

Previous research has also found limited use of the NRA for training and development purposes (Research International, 1993b). However, another evaluation of the NRA has found that employers who had issued the NRA to their staff had found it improved motivation and aided employees to identify their training requirements (Tomley, 1996). In this section, we discuss the benefits cited of using the NRA for these purposes, before going on to consider reasons for not using it. In this discussion, it must be borne in mind that where the NRA is used, it tends to be done on an *ad hoc* or informal basis. Furthermore, for almost half of those that said in the telephone interview they had used the NRA, it was found that they were contacted for the second stage of the fieldwork, when in fact they did not use it. Some of the benefits cited, therefore, may well be potential rather than actual benefits experienced.

The small number of employers who used the NRA for reviewing individual employee training or development needs were asked an open ended question on the benefits of doing so. The reasons given are shown in Table 4:3 and we can observe that for almost one-third of these, respondents found the recording of employee performance in the document beneficial. This benefit was mentioned more frequently by those with a medium sophistication rating, than by those with relatively highly sophisticated approaches to training and development. A further 18 per cent mentioned keeping everything relating to training and development in one document. Thus, the recording aspect of the NRA was key to almost half of the users. One respondent was considering using the NRA as a means of linking personnel data with training data. Another, who had relatively unsophisticated systems already in place, suggested that, potentially, the NRA could:

Table 4:3 Benefits of using the NRA for reviewing individual employee training or development needs (per cent)

Benefits	All
Performance of employees is recorded	30
Everything kept in one document	18
Relevance of training is improved	15
Highlights future needs of individual/forms a focus for development	15
Employees taking responsibility for managing their own development and training	12
Employees fill in paper work	9
Documentation more up to date	3
Other	6
No benefits	6
Don't know	24
N = employers who use the NRA for employee training or development purposes (multiple responses allowed)	33

Source: IES Survey, 1996

> *'. . . be very useful for benchmarking and undertaking a training needs analysis.'*

However, this employer found that because the number of employees who had NRAs was so small, it was not possible to use the NRA in this way at this stage. Improving the relevance of training, highlighting future needs, and employees taking responsibility for managing their own development and training, were each mentioned by around one in seven respondents to the question:

> *'It links to lifetime learning, and persuading workers to take some ownership of their own development.'*

This benefit was mentioned more frequently by those with the most sophisticated practices already in place. These findings suggest that the process of putting together the NRA was seen to have particular benefits as well as the outcome of providing a record, particularly among those with highly developed practices already in place. However, we must interpret these findings with caution, due to the very small sample of respondents.

4.3 Reasons for not using the NRA for reviewing individual training and development needs

In view of the small numbers who were able to comment on the benefits of using the NRA, it is perhaps more useful to consider the reasons for not using the NRA for reviewing individual training and development needs.

Table 4:4 Reasons for not using the NRA for reviewing individual training and development needs

Reasons	Very/fairly significant reason %	Mean score
It has never occurred to us to use the NRA for this purpose	59	3.8
There is insufficient guidance on how to use the NRA in this way	54	3.6
The NRA is only suitable for school children/immediate school leavers	48	3.3
The NRA does not add anything to our own systems	41	3.3
The NRA is incompatible with our own systems	14	2.3
The NRA is too complicated to be used for this purpose	7	1.9
N = aware non-users of the NRA who train/develop their employees (multiple responses allowed)	*298*	

Note: The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score.

Source: IES Survey, 1996

Employers who were aware of the NRA and trained and developed their staff, were asked questions relating to reasons for not using the NRA for training and development purposes. These employers were asked how significant a list of reasons for not doing so were on a scale of one (meaning insignificant) to five (meaning very significant). Their responses are shown in Table 4:4. The most significant reasons for not using the NRA were that it had never occurred to the employers to use the NRA for this purpose, and there is insufficient guidance on how to use the NRA in this way. Over half of the sample stated that these were very or fairly significant reasons. This suggests that there might be further scope for encouraging employers to use the NRA by better informing them of the benefits of doing so. However, half of employers viewed the NRA as only suitable for young people as a very or fairly significant reason for not using it. This indicates that the NRA is associated with school leavers, suggesting less of a perceived role for the workforce as a whole. One employer, who had an appraisal system in place which tied in with the objectives of the business plan, felt that:

> *'Once they start work, then what is important to me is how they are progressing in the job. I don't see the relevance of the NRA in that.'*

> *'There is no scope for using the NRA for our professional staff: they already have a higher level document. It could be used in conjunction with NVQs, but then that would create first and second class workers, which may stigmatise those with NRAs. Our ultimate aim is to treat everyone the same.'*

> *'It would be difficult using the NRA for all staff. Members of our sales force, for example, are very set in their ways.'*

For 41 per cent of this group of employers, the NRA not adding to their own systems was a very or fairly significant reason for not using it. Typical comments were:

'We have never considered using the NRA. It would not add anything to our systems.' — An employer with an appraisal system in place, with three-monthly reviews.

Other responses were:

'The NRA duplicates the company portfolio and goes beyond the company requirements. The portfolio does not go into their social life and hobbies.' — An employer who used personal portfolios of individual training development.

'We do not have enough time to use the NRA as well as our own individual training record — it would be re-inventing the wheel. The NRA does not add anything to the systems in place. The individual training record is specific to the job.'

Expense and time required seemed to be important issues for those employers who had seriously considered incorporating the NRA into their training and development management systems. One particular expense was ordering the documents; employers generally were unaware of where extra sheets and documents could be obtained. Respondents were also wary of using the NRA when it was relatively new and its success not proven.

'We have well developed systems for needs identification, producing and monitoring training plans. We do not want to graft the NRA onto this unless we are sure that they are universally available, that they are accepted by schools and young people and that the Department shows commitment to their future.'

We also asked whether there were any other reasons for not using the NRA, and approximately one-third of these respondents said that there were. These reasons are shown in Table 4:5, where we detail that the most significant factor is employees not having an NRA. This further illustrates the point made in Chapter 3, that usage of the NRA is generally supply side led.

'I forgot the girl had it. We don't use NRAs because employees don't have them.'

Lack of awareness and publicity was mentioned by nine per cent of respondents. From the face-to-face interviews, a key message coming through was that it was up to the individual to keep their NRA up to date.

'It is totally up to them whether they keep it up to date. They have enough responsibility to look after themselves. If they asked me to help, I would. Maybe for a 17 year old I would change my mind; they may need some extra guidance.'

One employer felt it was inappropriate to get involved with the NRAs as this would be spoon feeding them, and they did not want employees to rely on this.

Table 4:5 Other reasons for not using the NRA for reviewing individual training and development needs (per cent)

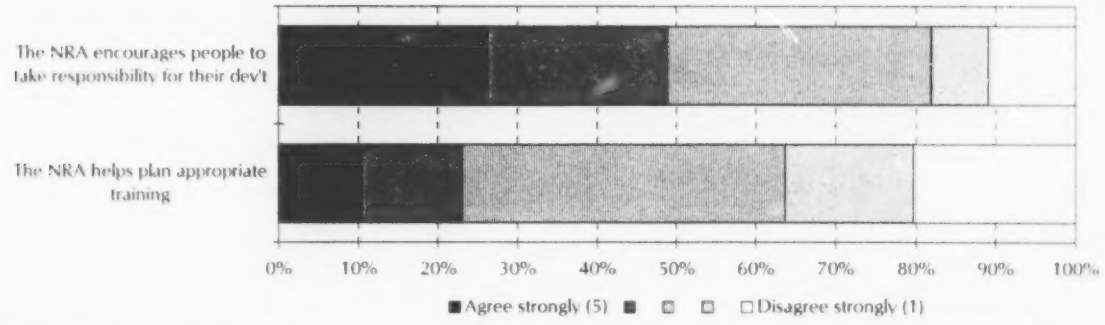
Reasons	All
Uncommon/few people have them/do not employ school leavers	14
Lack of awareness/no publicity/lack of knowledge	9
Only useful at initial/contact stage	3
Satisfied with own systems	2
Lack of credibility/not proven successful yet	2
Others	9
No other reason	66
N = aware non-users of the NRA who train/develop their employees (multiple responses allowed)	*298*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

4.4 Attitudes towards the NRA as a tool for reviewing training and development needs

We can see from Figure 4:1 that almost half of respondents agreed that the NRA encourages people to take responsibility for their development and training. This proportion increases very slightly among those who have a good understanding of the NRA, and also increases with the sophistication of methods in place. However, less than a quarter of our employers felt that the NRA helped to plan relevant training. These results suggest that the NRA is more useful to individuals, perhaps by providing somewhere to store their certificates and a record of training and experience, and through the action planning process. The NRA was seen as a document owned by the individual, and it was up to them to keep it up to date. The implication was that it was up to schools to stress the need to update them, not employers. The NRA is seen as much less useful to employers for planning the training of their employees. This may be a reflection of a lack of

Figure 4:1 Employer attitudes towards the NRA as a tool for reviewing training and development needs



Source: IES Survey, 1996

awareness of the potential benefits, but the fact that a high proportion of these employers already have sophisticated systems in place is also likely to have a bearing on this finding. In the following chapter, we consider the scope for further use of the NRA in the future.

4.5 Summary

- Our respondents were quite 'sophisticated' in terms of their approach to training and development, and the practices they have in place. The large majority used performance appraisals and formally reviewed the longer term development needs of their employees.
- Where the NRA was used, it was used in addition to other mechanisms for reviewing and planning training and development. Almost all of the very small number of employers who used the NRA for training and development, also used performance appraisals. Three-quarters used personal development plans together with the NRA, although it is not clear whether these documents were used for the same groups of staff.
- The NRA was seen as being owned by the individual, not the employer. The majority of employers who used the NRA saw their role as being to encourage and support individuals to keep it up to date. The NRA being used on a formal basis to plan training and development was rare.
- One of the main benefits of using the NRA for these purposes included recording employee performance. However, the process of putting the NRA together was also seen as beneficial in that it encourages employees to take responsibility for their own development.
- The NRA was not seen as being particularly helpful to employers when planning training.
- The main reason for not using the NRA in training and development was that employers had never thought of it. There being insufficient guidance on how to use the NRA in this way was also a significant reason for not making use of it.
- Although our findings suggest that the advantages of using the NRA relate more to the individual, there are also benefits for the employer. These are both indirect, through motivating the workforce, and direct, through providing a record of individuals' skills and training. Our results suggest that there may be scope for encouraging employers to use the NRA by better informing them of these benefits of doing so.
- The NRA is associated with school leavers. Employers see less scope for using it in its current format for their workforces as a whole.

5. Potential for Future Use and Overall Assessment of the NRA

This chapter considers the potential for future use, and provides an overall assessment of employers' attitudes towards the NRA. We first provide a discussion of the aspects of the NRA which may be useful for those who have not used the NRA in recruitment, and then the suggested improvements which could be made to the document.

5.1 Potential for future use of the NRA in recruitment

5.1.1 Aspects of the NRA which might be useful to non-users

Almost one-third (29 per cent) of those respondents who had not used the NRA in recruitment stated that there were features of the NRA which may be useful to them in the future. This proportion increased to 34 per cent among the employers who recruited young people every year. Almost half (47 per cent) of those with a good understanding of NRA said the NRA may be useful in the recruitment process, thus indicating that there is scope for encouraging employers to make use of the document.

Those employers who said there were features of the NRA which would be useful were asked an open ended question about what these might be. We show in Table 5:1 the aspects of the NRA referred to. A wide range of aspects were mentioned, and ten per cent said the whole document would be useful. The section on personal achievements was referred to by one-fifth of these respondents.

Our findings have clearly shown that the NRA is a document used by young people, generally school leavers, as a presentational tool for a prospective employer. Some employers felt that it would not be appropriate for adults to present an NRA to an employer at an interview:

> *'It would create the wrong kind of image; it would almost put me off; it would be a bit "naff". I would assume they were a certain type and that is not the type we want to employ.'*

> *'The NRA would not be appropriate for adults; we get all the information we need from a CV.'*

Table 5:1 Parts of the NRA which may be useful in the recruitment process (per cent)

Parts of the NRA	NRA non-users (in recruitment)
Personal achievements	20
Work experience reports	15
Attendance record	10
Attitude assessment	10
Educational qualifications gained	10
References	7
Skills/competences gained	7
School reports/school work details	5
The NRA gives full description of individual and provides complete information	5
All of it	10
Others	20
Don't know/not stated	5
N = those aware non-users who feel the NRA could be useful in the recruitment process	*41*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

However, other respondents would be impressed by the tenacity demonstrated, if an individual had kept an NRA up to date. One, in particular, had come across an interviewee with a similar sort of portfolio, which they found very impressive. Some employers also felt that greater use could be made of the NRA by graduates, as one interviewee suggested:

> *'They could put things in there like their involvement in a student newspaper, societies they belonged to, student union, extra curricular activities, and their outside interests.'*

In general, this research shows that employers see an NRA type document as more useful to adults as a tool, which is owned by the individual, to enable them to draw up effective CVs and applications. One respondent commented that:

> *'It needs to be sold as back up to a CV: the database behind the CV, and somewhere to keep certificates safe.'*

The view was that the NRA is not something adults should necessarily show to a prospective employer.

5.1.2 Changes which could be made to the NRA to make it more useful in recruitment

Both users and non-users were asked an open-ended question about the changes which could be made to the document to make it more useful to them in their recruitment procedures. One-third of users and 29 per cent of non-users responded that

Table 5:2 Changes employers suggest could be made to the NRA, to make it more useful for recruitment purposes (unprompted) (per cent)

Changes	NRA users (in recruitment)	NRA non-users (in recruitment)
The NRA needs to be simplified/made more concise	18	12
An honest opinion from teachers/genuine reference/verification is needed	10	5
Guidance on how to use the NRA should be provided	9	2
Weaknesses should be included as well as strengths	8	5
The NRA needs to be complete/up to date	6	–
The NRA needs to be standardised/there should be rigorous standards for the applicant	6	5
More publicity/promotion of the NRA is required	5	24
There should be a section on skills gained	5	5
More emphasis on work experience needed	4	5
A career ambition/reason for wanting job statement should be included	3	–
The NRA should be issued at an earlier age	3	–
More individuals should be encouraged to use the NRA/present them to employers	3	15
Details should be provided on character/personality	3	–
The NRA should be used more by adults	3	2
There should be more detail in the NRA/the NRA should be less vague	3	2
Other	13	17
N = those aware who feel changes should be made to the NRA	*78*	*41*

Source: IES Survey, 1996

changes could be made. The types of changes suggested by this sub-set of employers are detailed in Table 5:2.

For users, the most frequently suggested improvement was simplifying the document and making it more concise. As we noted in Chapter 3, some employers found the NRA too lengthy to look through at an interview, and too cumbersome to be sent to an employer prior to interview. However, in general among those employers visited, length of the NRA was not seen as a problem. Employers would like more signposting, categorisation and evidence provided clearly.

Our respondents were wary of being presented with a customised expanded CV drawn up from the full document, rather than the NRA itself. The view was that unless a summary sheet was very well written, it would not give a rounded view of the applicant and provide sufficient clues to promote discussion at interview. It would also need to be adapted for the context in which it was being used and kept up to date. Furthermore, it

would be precisely the less able pupils to whom the NRA may be of particular benefit who may lose out, as they are the ones who are likely to be less able to draw up an effective summary. For a summary to work, it needs to be continually updated, and individuals need to be equipped with the skills to write them effectively. The following quotes illustrate the prevailing viewpoints.

'If the NRA was put into a summary, you would lose a lot. The information would become too generic.'

'I like the idea of condensing it, but I wonder whether young people might take out the fundamental information we are interested in.'

'It would depend on the guidance they got in drawing up an expanded CV. It could in theory be a good idea, but you might lose the individuality: they would become too stereotyped.'

'Ten per cent may be quite good at pulling out the relevant bits, ie those who get help from their parents, but what about the rest? There would need to be more help from schools.'

'I don't believe the least able candidates would have the skills to customise and summarise the NRA for particular job applications. Something that currently gives them a chance would be less likely to do so, if this change was made. It would defeat the whole object of the NRA.'

One employer argued that the drawing up of summaries and the full document need not be mutually exclusive. Another added:

'For school leavers applying for their first job, we like to see the whole NRA, but for adults we want a short CV.'

It was proposed that a number of sections, or more detail, should be added to the NRA. Including information relating to weaknesses as well as strengths was one suggestion, although generally the NRA focusing only on positive aspects was not seen as an issue. CVs and applications generally only cover strengths, and respondents argued that it is up to an interviewer to draw out the weaknesses.

Inclusion of a career ambition statement was suggested. A 'where I want to be in five years time' type statement was seen as being useful, but it was argued that pupils need to be taught to write succinctly for this to be successful. Some employers wanted more detail on skills, work experience, personal attributes and personality. It was also felt that all the statements included in the NRA should be backed up by evidence and examples. It was argued that schools should take on a greater role in helping young people prepare NRAs and for the world of work in general, and also stressing the importance of it. As one employer argued:

'Schools need to push on the importance of presentation, whether through the NRA or otherwise. Kids don't seem to realise how important it is to be seen to be keen, motivated, alert etc.'

Ten per cent of users felt that authentication of the document would add value. Two employers made particular requests:

'I would like a head teacher report as well as reports from subject and form teachers.'

'We want references in the NRA, as often schools won't give them when we request them.'

As we noted in Chapter 3, employers look for evidence to show that what is said in the NRA is true.

Employers recommended that different types of information should be included in a version of the NRAs suitable for adults, such as more detail on work experience and core skills. One respondent argued:

'We need different things in there for adults, such as a section on training courses completed, competences gained from work experience, and particularly important achievements, such as meeting a deadline.'

5.1.3 Guidance on how to use, and promotion of, the NRA

One-quarter of non-users mentioned better publicity and promotion of the NRA. One in ten users suggested that guidance should be provided on how to use the NRA, perhaps not having received the information that exists. We showed in Chapter 2 that the most common source of awareness was through young people themselves. Some respondents felt that it was up to the schools to push the NRA with their pupils. A comment made was:

'I think it's one of those things that if you see more of it, you'll make more use of it.'

However, others felt that it was not appropriate that increased employer understanding should come through the users. Leaflets and mailshots were also seen as ineffective unless they were particularly eye catching. One small employer had particular difficulties:

'The DfEE are very poor at educating employers about things like the NRA. It is difficult for small employers to keep up to date. You have to be a mini expert on things like recruitment for only a few days a year, and you need to know where to go for advice.'

Employer forums such as Investors in People and IPD meetings, or seminars run by Chambers of Commerce, Business Links or Education Business Partnerships, were all felt to be useful avenues to promote the NRA. Employers suggested that intermediary organisations such as TECs, Careers Services, Jobcentres, and Education Business Partnerships, should all have a role in promoting and providing guidance on the NRA. Employers would like contact names for where to go for information and support on how to use the NRA. One employer added that:

'We need someone to come in and see me or a group of managers. It's the old thing like NVQs: employers are not aware until someone comes in and talks to them.'

There was also felt to be scope in linking the NRA with other initiatives such as Investors in People, Modern Apprenticeships and the NVQ system, in particular. The general view was that promotion and guidance was something which needed to be handled with great care and, as with NVQs, raising awareness of the NRA will take time.

5.2 Potential for future use of the NRA for training and development purposes

One of the employers visited was in the process of setting up a system of linking the company individual development plan with the NRA. The new system would put all the information about a member of staff in one place; individuals would update it but the company would provide administrative support. The main benefits of doing this were seen as maintaining data about individuals which would be useful when considering promotions, boosting the confidence of the workforce, and creating a development culture. Further advantages would be bringing in additional information about people, their activities, interests and skills, increasing self awareness, and providing staff with a current CV.

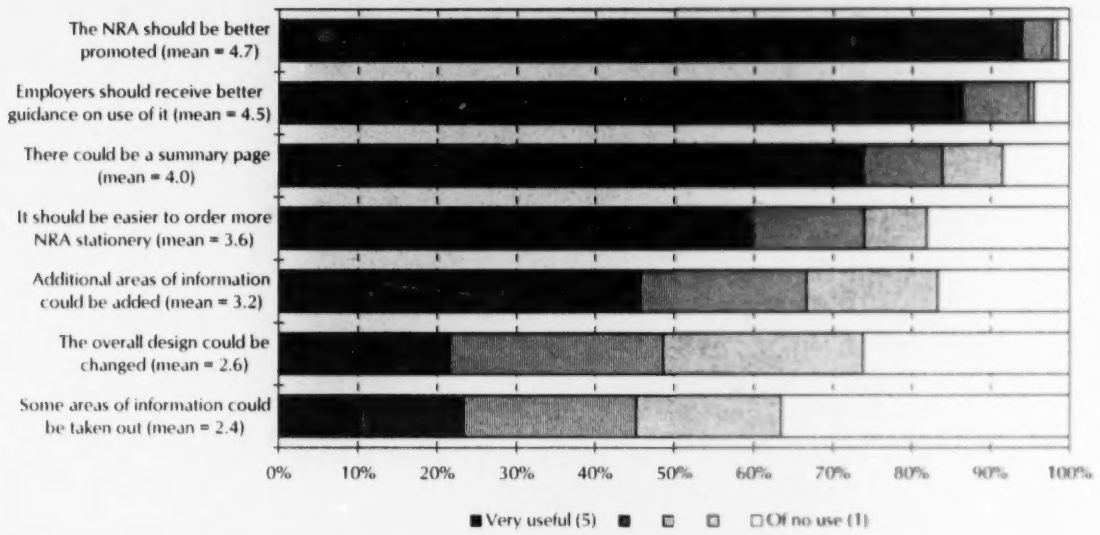
As we outlined in Chapter 4, the prevailing view was that the NRA belonged to the individual and it was up to individuals to update it. However, there is a role for employers in providing support, encouragement and usage of IT equipment. A major issue with the NRA is that updating generally stops when a young person leaves school. Employers see it as a school-based document and, if anything, see the onus being on schools to motivate young people to continue using it after school. The value of the NRA clearly needs to be appreciated by young people, and both schools and employers have a role in promoting this:

'I would like schools to stress to young people the need to keep them up to date. I ask staff to do this, but I know some don't bother.'

NRA aware respondents were asked if the document could be improved to make it more useful for employee training and development purposes. One-third said it could, and these employers were asked how useful a suggested list of improvements would be to them, on a scale of one to five. The results to this question are shown in Figure 5:1 overleaf.

Reflecting the proposed changes listed in Table 5:2, better promoting the NRA, and better guidance on how the NRA can be used, are clearly the most useful changes which could be made. Over eighty per cent of this sub-sample stated that these changes would either be very useful, or useful. As we noted above, more use could be made of the NRA by linking it with

Figure 5:1 Improvements employers would like to see made to the NRA


The NRA should be better promoted (mean = 4.7)
Employers should receive better guidance on use of it (mean = 4.5)
There could be a summary page (mean = 4.0)
It should be easier to order more NRA stationery (mean = 3.6)
Additional areas of information could be added (mean = 3.2)
The overall design could be changed (mean = 2.6)
Some areas of information could be taken out (mean = 2.4)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Very useful (5)
Of no use (1)

Notes: N = 134. All who feel the NRA could be improved to make it more useful for employee training and development purposes.

The nearer the mean score is to five the higher the rating. Three is a mid-scale score.

Source: IES Survey, 1996

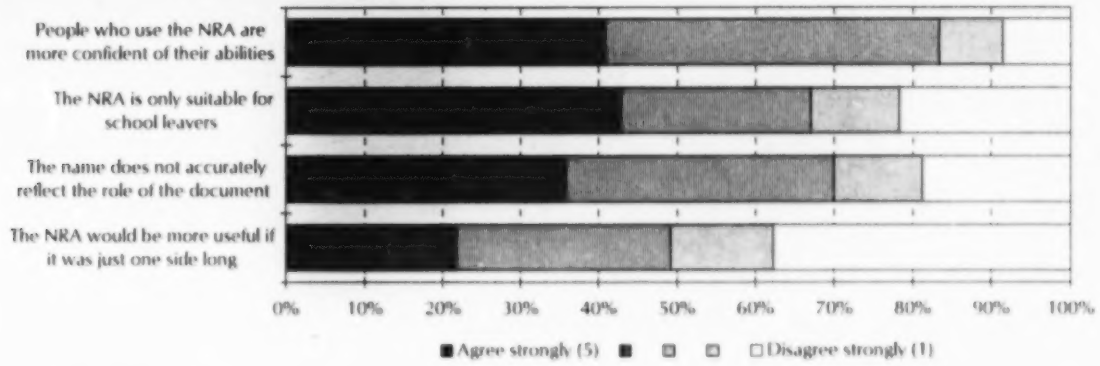
the gathering of evidence for NVQs. We outlined in Section 5.1 that simplifying the document was viewed as being potentially helpful. Almost three-quarters of these respondents would like to see a summary page, but as we discussed above, this should not replace the full document, and any summary must be very carefully drawn up. Adding further information, changing the design, and taking out sections, were not seen as being particularly useful changes by the majority of respondents.

These results generally suggest that there may be scope for more use to be made of the document, if there was greater promotion of the NRA, and more support provided to employers on how to use it.

5.3 Overall assessment of the NRA

There are clearly benefits in the process of putting together an NRA as well as the outcome in terms of providing a record. We therefore asked respondents whether they felt people who use the NRA are more confident of their abilities, and 38 per cent of our respondents agreed that they were. This proportion increased to almost half (47 per cent) among employers who had used the NRA in recruitment. Overall over one-fifth agreed strongly that NRA users are more confident. Few respondents disagreed with the statement but around one-third were neutral, *ie* neither agreed or disagreed. There were clearly seen to be no negative effects, but one-third of employers were unable to say whether

Figure 5:2 Employer attitudes towards the NRA



Source: IES Survey, 1996

there were necessarily any positive ones. Many of the employers visited found it difficult to say whether there was any difference between those with and those without NRAs, although some felt possession of an NRA enhanced their performance at an interview.

Under half of respondents agreed with the statement that the NRA is only suitable for school children or immediate school leavers. This indicates that over half of our employers may see scope in extending the use of the NRA to the wider workforce, albeit in a slightly different format and covering different areas of information, as we outline above.

Just over one-third felt that the name 'the NRA' was inappropriate. It was suggested that the NRA, as it is used currently, was in fact a school record of achievement. Respondents felt a better name might be a personal record of achievement. It was suggested that such a name change might encourage greater usage after leaving school. It was also recommended that the appearance and format of the NRA should be made more appealing to young people. This may increase its value and motivate young people. However, an adult version of the NRA may come in a different format. Perhaps confirming our discussion in Section 5.1.2, few employers felt that the NRA should be reduced to one side in length.

5.4 Summary

- Our findings suggest that there is scope for encouraging more employers to make use of the NRA. Around one-third of knowledgeable non-users thought that it might be useful to them in the future.
- The NRA was seen as something that is used by young people, capturing school-age achievements.

- It was felt that in its current format, the NRA would not be an appropriate document for *adults*, as opposed to young people, to present to a prospective employer. However, an NRA type portfolio would have a role as a personal resource to enable them to draw up effective CVs and applications.
- All aspects of the NRA were seen as generally useful.
- The most frequently suggested improvement was simplifying the NRA and making it more concise. However, reducing the NRA to a summary document was not seen as appropriate. Young people would need guidance to enable them to draw up effective summaries. Respondents also felt that the fundamental information they are interested in may be left out, if the NRA was presented to them in summary.
- More promotion and information about the NRA was seen as important by those who had not used the NRA. Integrating the NRA with initiatives such as Modern Apprenticeships, Investors in People, and NVQs, was seen as a potential vehicle for promoting the NRA. Employer forums or seminars run by Chambers of Commerce or Education Business Partnerships were all felt to be useful avenues to promote the NRA.
- There were a number of suggestions on features which could be added to the NRA, such as more detail on skills, work experience, career plans and personality. If the document is to be used for adults, employers want to see sections on competences gained at work and work based achievements.
- The prevailing view was that the NRA was owned by the individual and it was up to individuals to keep their NRAs up to date. The value of the NRA clearly needs to be appreciated by young people, and both schools and employers have a role in motivating them to update the NRA.
- Better promoting the NRA, and better guidance on how the NRA can be used, are clearly the most important changes which could be made to encourage more use in training and development.
- There are clearly benefits in the process of putting together an NRA as well as the outcome in terms of providing a record. Almost half of employers who had used the NRA in recruitment felt that NRA users were more confident of their abilities.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Employers' use of the NRA: theory vs practice

6.1.1 The theory

The NCVQ employers' guide for using the NRA (NCVQ, 1994) sets out how the NRA can be used and benefit businesses. The guide states that the NRA can help employers to meet business objectives in a number of ways. It can help:

- **increase the effectiveness of selection** — the document explains that by presenting a wide range of information in a clear and systematic format, the NRA gives employers a clearer indication of whether applicants have all the attributes needed for the job.
- **plan for cost effective staff training and make more effective use of human resources** — it is suggested that the action planning element of the NRA can help with the evaluation and identification of training needs:

  'Using the NRA can increase your confidence that any investment made in training or development meets the needs of your business, and of each individual employee, building upon their existing skills, qualities and commitment.' (NCVQ 1994, p.2)

  If the NRA is used business wide, it may, over time, outline potential and new possibilities in workforce utilisation, or identify skill shortages.

- **develop self management skills in staff, and a committed, effective workforce:**

  'Experience has shown that where the NRA is used regularly, people take greater control and develop higher levels of commitment to their own development. They are encouraged to take pride in their achievements, recognise their potential and become part of a more motivated and effective workforce.' (NCVQ, 1994, p.3)

Advocates of the NRA see it forming the central framework to facilitate lifetime learning and individual commitment to learning. The question is whether the NRA is used in this way and whether there is potential for it to be so.

6.1.2 The practice

The research findings indicate that:

- the NRA is currently used by relatively few employers, and use tends to be restricted to those who regularly recruit young people. The NRA makes little impact upon employers. It is rare for it to be used as a basis for managing training and development, and it does not generally influence employers' employment policies.
- employers who encounter the NRA during the recruitment process do so in an interview situation, where it can be useful as a discussion tool for young people who have little or no experience of presenting themselves in an interview situation, but the NRA tends to have a fairly contained role in selection.
- the NRA is seen as a young person's document — in its current format, employers generally do not view the NRA as an appropriate document for adults to present to a prospective employer.
- Employers see the NRA as being school-based. It captures school-age achievements, not experience gained at work, college, university or in training.
- The NRA is positive — it presents positive achievements and it is generally not seen as a discriminating document.
- It is backward looking — *ie* the emphasis is on past achievements rather than forward plans, objectives and ambitions. It marks the end of education not the beginning of employment. It is not widely used as the current grid reference of an individual's lifelong journey.

In sum, the NRA is peripheral to an individual's relationship with the labour market, not at the core. It is, at best, used to sum up their initial achievements in order to get their first or second job. The NRA is not 'mainstreamed' within employer systems.

6.2 Individual vs organisational perspective

Underpinning the NRA is its dual purpose as:

- a presentational tool, and
- a personal resource.

We have looked at the NRA from an organisational perspective, yet it is generally seen as an individual's document. Employers clearly find benefits in seeing school leavers' NRAs, but ownership of the NRA is seen as very much lying with the individual. The onus is on the individual to keep it up to date. It provides a format for individuals to record their achievements, reflect on their experiences, recognise their skills and abilities, and plan their future learning and development.

The NRA is unlikely to replace an application form. It does, however, have a key role in supporting job search by facilitating the drawing up of effective job applications, and acting as a repository for evidence to support an application. Thus, the NRA can help employers better understand an individual's potential.

We may conclude from our research findings that its main value lies more with it being a personal resource. In this respect, the views of organisations should be used to inform the review of the NRA but they should not necessarily determine the outcomes.

With this in mind, employers want the NRA to be:

- simplified— through clear signposting, categorisation and sub-divisions, but within a common structure, and not over-simplified by being reduced to just a summary
- well written, succinct and meaningful
- supported — young people need to be motivated and have the skills and the physical resources to update it. They also need the skills to use it effectively for both recruitment and training and development purposes.
- easy to maintain and update — *ie* progressive.

Employers would also like:

- more guidance on how the NRA should be used and the benefits of using it, and
- the name NRA to be changed.

6.3 Determinants of use

There is clearly a need to raise the demand for sustained use of the NRA, so that it is not just used as a passport to get out of school and into work, but to promote lifelong learning. The research findings imply that the determinants of use are:

- **Encouraging young people to maintain the NRA**. Schools, employers and careers advisors all have a role to play in this. It needs to be sold to young people as an attractive and indispensable tool.
- **Equipping people to be able to maintain the NRA**. All individuals need to be provided with the career development skills to enable them to maintain the NRA, and the importance of reviewing, revising and planning needs to be emphasised. Access to the physical resources, such as word processing facilities and NRA stationery, also need to be available to all. An important issue here is that if a greater emphasis is placed on the NRA in selection and development, then those who do not have one will be disenfranchised, yet they may well be the very people who most need one.

- **Ensuring the NRA is as compatible with work-based systems as possible** so that it could either be used as a receptacle for an employer's personnel development plan, or if there was no employer based system for planning development in place, the NRA could provide a simple structure for individuals to plan their learning and development, with or without the support of their employer.
- **Integrating it within other policies and initiatives**, such as Youth Training, Modern Apprenticeships, NVQs, Investors in People, job search programmes for the unemployed and adult guidance, the outcomes of which could be deposited in the NRA. The NRA should, therefore, be an integral part of a national lifelong learning strategy.
- **Educating employers about the NRA**. Our findings suggest that employer forums and links with education may be useful vehicles for informing employers about the benefits of using and supporting the updating of NRAs.

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* These reports were derived from Institute research conducted outside the Commentary remit.

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76

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